

Relationships between Discourse, Reader Identity, and Reading Self-Efficacy in a High  
School English Classroom: A Mixed Methods, Critical Ethnographic Study

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## **Dedication**

This dissertation is for my parents, Marcus and Linda Kolb, who have been my biggest supporters through many years of higher education.



## **Abstract**

Understanding that academic motivation and engagement are critical for youths' literacy learning and achievement in schools, this mixed methods, critical ethnographic study explored how social and discursive constructions of reading and literacy in a high school English classroom (for example, what was valued as reading in the classroom context) contributed to youths' self-perceptions as readers. Supported by a theoretical framework including sociocognitive, sociocultural, and critical perspectives, I considered how classroom curricula, pedagogical practices, and everyday classroom interactions influenced students' reader identities and reading self-efficacy. A combination of qualitative and quantitative data sources – including participant observations, classroom artifacts, audio-video recordings of classroom activities, semi-structured interviews, and student surveys – provided rich accounts of the classroom cultural context; the social and discursive construction of classroom expectations and practices related to reading and literacy; and the influence of these classroom discourses on students' identities and self-efficacy. Methods of analysis included constant comparative analyses, critical discourse analyses, and descriptive statistical analyses. Findings indicated that while students' self-efficacy beliefs were influenced by local classroom practices, definitions, and values for reading (especially as classroom discourses encouraged reading with multimodal texts), their reader identities depended largely on well-established, fixed ideologies of reading. These findings suggest that while teachers might marshal features of curriculum and pedagogy to support positive developments in students' reading self-efficacy, it might be more challenging to encourage similar changes in students' overall identities as readers.

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## **PART I**

### **Framing the Study**

## **CHAPTER ONE**

### **Introduction**

#### **Background**

Decades of research have demonstrated the general importance of motivation and engagement for students' academic achievement across content domains (Wentzel & Wigfield, 2009), including in reading education (Guthrie & Coddington, 2009). Among other components of achievement motivation, students' academic self-efficacy – or their “perceived capabilities for learning or performing actions at designated levels” (Schunk & Pajares, 2009, p. 35) – has been identified as a particularly important predictor of engagement and achievement in school. Youth who demonstrate high levels of self-efficacy (i.e., students who feel more confident in their abilities to successfully accomplish learning or performance goals in specific academic contexts) are generally more likely to select challenging tasks; pursue more challenging goals; expend greater energy to complete tasks successfully; show greater self-regulation, persistence, and use of learning strategies; and show higher levels of achievement (Guthrie, Coddington, & Wigfield, 2009; McTigue, Washburn, & Liew, 2009; Schunk & Pajares, 2009; Schunk & Zimmerman, 2007). In literacy education in particular, researchers have demonstrated relationships between increased self-efficacy, higher achievement in reading and writing (Shell, Colvin, & Bruning, 1997), and greater willingness to engage in literacy activities (Smith & Wilhelm, 2004). Given such findings, it is clear that in order to fully support students' academic engagement and achievement, educators must also encourage more confident, self-efficacious learners.

A range of personal, social, and contextual factors have been shown to contribute to students' academic self-efficacy, including their histories of successes or failures, their observations of others' successes or failures, encouragement or discouragement from others, and physiological cues like physical anxiety or nervousness. Typically, youth feel more self-efficacious when they have been successful in the past; when they view others being successful; when they receive positive, targeted feedback that emphasizes the importance of effort; and when they do not feel physically anxious or nervous (Schunk & Pajares, 2009). In addition, there is evidence of a positive relationship between reading self-efficacy and positive reader identity. Youth who identify as readers, particularly as good readers, feel more confident in their abilities to successfully complete reading tasks and are more willing to engage in reading (Bozack, 2011; Hall, 2009). How youth develop such positive and self-efficacious reader identities in school contexts is a complex question, but past research suggests that discourses surrounding what "counts" as reading, how curricula and pedagogy frame reading, and how students perceive reader expectations in classrooms play an important role in this process (Hall, 2009; Rex, 2001; Skerrett, 2012).

### **Research Problem**

Too little empirical work, however, has focused on more fully understanding relationships between classroom discourse, students' reader identities, and reading self-efficacy. First, although a great deal of research has explored the influence of classroom and social contexts on youths' reading motivations, many such studies have limited their investigative scope to analyses focused only on local, micro-level interactions and social

practices. For example, studies of reading self-efficacy have most often examined the impact of variables like teacher feedback and teacher modeling (Guthrie & Coddington, 2009). While valuable, these studies have tended not to consider how local social contexts have themselves been shaped by more global, macro-level social structures; they have therefore overlooked an important part of the sociocultural milieu in which youth become (or do not become) self-identified, engaged, and proficient readers. If we are to understand how youths' identities and motivations as readers develop in schools, we must consider not only how students become confident and successful readers in local classroom contexts, but also how broader social, political, and ideological pressures expand or limit possibilities for literacy learning and reader identity development within those local contexts (Brandt & Clinton, 2002). And second, while previous research has suggested a positive relationship between reading self-efficacy and positive reader identity (Bozack, 2011; Hall, 2009), the field would benefit from additional empirical work focused on understanding the direction of this relationship and its interaction with classroom discourses.

The need to examine how broader social, political, and institutional understandings of reading shape classroom curricula and learning is especially pressing in the current educational context. Among English and reading educators in the United States, common critiques of the now widespread Common Core State Standards (CCSS) for English Language Arts have questioned the standards' requirements regarding text selection and text complexity, ways of reading and interpreting texts, and the prevalence of standardized, high-stakes assessments to measure student progress. Such critics argue, in part, that the CCSS are based on misguided understandings of literacy and education



that serve corporate interests and limit teachers' abilities to adapt curriculum and instruction to particular students' needs. As more states and school districts fully implement the CCSS over the next several years, it will be essential to study how curricular changes based on CCSS benchmarks affect students' learning experiences in individual classrooms.

### **The Current Study**

Motivated by the concerns outlined above, in the current study I set out to accomplish two goals. First, I will describe how classroom discourses of reading and literacy in one high school English classroom — as manifest in curricula, pedagogical practices, and everyday classroom interactions — affected students' self-perceptions and motivations readers. Second, I will call attention to how these classroom discourses may have been motivated by larger social and institutional ideologies regarding the values of different types of reading and literacy learning. Three research questions guided the study:

1. How do students perceive themselves as readers?
2. How are classroom reading practices and goals discursively defined by curriculum and pedagogy?
3. How do discursive definitions of reading influence individual students' reader identities and self-efficacy?

A mixed methods, critical ethnographic study, this project draws on a range of data sources, including: participant observations and field notes, semi-structured interviews, classroom artifacts, student surveys, and student achievement data. I provide a more thorough overview of the study's methodology — including descriptions of the research

design, research site and participants, and data collection and analysis procedures — in Chapter Three.

The results of this research will contribute to literacy educators' understanding of relationships between classroom discourse, reader identity, and reading self-efficacy among adolescent learners. Theoretically, this study has the potential to add to existing models of how youth become motivated and engaged learners in classroom contexts. And more practically, this research may suggest new ways of increasing student reading achievement through curricula and pedagogy that aim to develop self-identified and self-efficacious readers.

### **Summary**

In this introduction, I have provided an overview of the current study, the purpose of which is to examine relationships between classroom discourses of reading, student reader identity, and students' self-efficacy as readers. I have previewed the study's scholarly and practical contexts, as well as the research design.

In the following chapters, I expand each of these sections. Chapter Two reviews the current research literature on classroom discourses of reading, adolescent student identity, and reading self-efficacy before describing the theoretical framework for my study. Chapter Three outlines the study's methodology, including details related to the research design, research participants and recruitment, and data collection and analysis. Chapters Four and Five present the research findings, with alternating foci on the classroom curriculum and students' experiences in the classroom. Chapter Five also summarizes the research findings with an eye toward practical implications, theoretical

advancements, and directions for further study. Chapter Six summarizes the results of the study and suggests directions for future research.

## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **Conceptual Framework**

#### **Chapter Overview**

The previous chapter provided an overview of the current study, which seeks to understand how discourses and ideologies of reading and literacy in a high school English classroom affected students' self-perceptions and self-efficacy as readers. In this chapter, I will further contextualize the study by reviewing past research literature related to youth motivation, self-efficacy, reader identity, and discursive constructions of reading and literacy in classrooms. The overarching goal of this chapter is to provide an empirical and theoretical rationale for the present study of classroom discourse, reader identity, and reading self-efficacy.

#### **Review of Literature**

In general, attention to academic motivation and identity in schools is essential for supporting students' learning. Decades of research have demonstrated that motivation and engagement are consistent predictors of academic achievement across content domains (Wentzel & Wigfield, 2009), including in English language arts and reading (Guthrie & Coddington, 2009). In the absence of adequate achievement motivation, students are less likely to approach learning tasks with the mental energy, curiosity, effort, strategy, or persistence that is required to learn new skills and to develop deeper content knowledge.

Similarly, students' adoption or construction of academic identities in classrooms may play an important role in how they engage (or do not engage) in academic work,

particularly in literacy-related activities. Bozack (2011), for example, found significant correlations between positive reader identity and interest and enjoyment in reading, reading self-efficacy, and willingness to engage in challenging reading tasks. Other researchers (e.g., Hall, 2006, 2007, 2009, 2010; Moje & Dillon, 2006; Smith & Wilhelm, 2002; Tatum, 2006) have reported extensively on connections between reader identity, reading behavior, and achievement, finding that adolescent youth may participate in or avoid essential literacy tasks in order to claim or reject particular academic identities. Thus, if we wish to understand whether and how youth achieve in school settings, we must also strive to understand whether and how they are motivated and self-identified learners.

### **Schools and Classrooms as Contexts for Youth Motivation**

A great many individual, social, and contextual factors contribute to students' motivation and engagement in schools. Often, students' personal academic histories are among the most influential factors that shape their willingness to engage in classroom learning activities and their motivation to reach high levels of achievement. Youth with long histories of failure (or perceived failure) in reading, for example, are likely to resist additional reading experiences in order to avoid feelings of low ability and low self-worth; these students are also less likely to persist in the face of reading challenges (Guthrie & Wigfield, 1997). However, we must look beyond youths' individual histories to also consider the immediate role of social and institutional factors within schools and classrooms.

Such concerns are the basis for extensive programs of educational research – much more research than I can adequately summarize in a few short pages. Therefore, I will not attempt to present an exhaustive review of this research literature. Instead, I will briefly describe three general categories or groups of contextual features that are important in shaping students’ motivation and achievement in schools. I specifically touch on contextual influences related to teachers and student-teacher relationships, peers and peer relationships, and the curricula and learning materials that organize students’ learning in classrooms. These are not the only factors that contribute to youths’ motivation in schools; Roeser, Urda, and Stephens (2009), for example, highlighted several institutional and organizational aspects of schooling – like school size, the availability of economic resources, and the composition of student bodies – that emerged as predictors of student motivation in past research. However, contextual features related to teachers, peers, and the curriculum are often among the most powerful influences on youth motivation and engagement. Moreover, they demonstrate the range of variables that teachers and researchers must consider when assessing student motivation and achievement.

**Teachers and student-teacher relationships.** Unsurprisingly, classroom teachers – and the ways that they interact with their students – are consistently important influences on students’ motivation and engagement in school. How teachers respond to student work, how they engage youth in classroom discussions, and how they interact with youth as people, all contribute to students’ perspectives on themselves as individuals as well as their motivational stances as learners. Students’ academic motivation,

particularly their self-efficacy, increases when teachers provide feedback that is clearly stated, that emphasizes the centrality of effort in shaping academic success (as opposed to inherent ability), and that refers to specific task-based achievements (e.g., good use of reading strategies) in relation to learning goals (Alderman, 2008). In order to provide these kinds of motivating feedback, teachers must hold high achievement expectations for all learners – and avoid suggesting to students, either directly or indirectly, that they are not able to meet high achievement goals. Jussim and colleagues (2009) summarized extensive research around “teacher expectations and self-fulfilling prophecies” (p. 349), noting that teachers may indirectly telegraph low expectations for students through whole-group instruction and individual feedback; students respond to these messages with low motivation and low achievement, confirming the teachers’ “originally false (but now true) expectation” (p. 349). Thus, to effectively support student motivation and school achievement, classroom teachers must try to respond to youth in ways that communicate confidence in the students’ abilities to learn from feedback and to be academically successful.

Beyond providing effective feedback and maintaining high achievement expectations, however, teachers must also build relationships with students as individuals with unique identities, backgrounds, and learning needs. As Wentzel (2009) reported, “Effective teachers are typically described as those who develop relationships with students that are emotionally close, safe, and trusting, that provide access to instrumental help, and that foster a more general ethos of community and caring in classrooms” (p. 301). Researchers who study motivation as well as scholars of curriculum and pedagogy (e.g., Duncan-Andrade & Morrell, 2008; Milner, 2011) have argued that strong, caring

student-teacher relationships encourage more motivated, interested, proactive, and self-efficacious students, who then tend to show higher academic achievement (Crosnoe, Johnson, & Elder, 2004; Ibanez, Kuperminc, Jurkovic, & Perilla, 2004; Midgley, Feldlaufer, & Eccles, 1989; Murdock & Miller, 2003; Wentzel, 1997, 1998, 2009).

**Peers and peer relationships.** Peers and peer relationships constitute a second major contextual influence on youths' motivation and engagement in classroom spaces. In a brief but illustrative overview of the literature on peer relationships and school engagement, Ladd, Herald-Brown, and Kochel (2009) examined the particular roles of three peer-related variables in shaping students' academic engagement. These variables include peer acceptance/rejection, peer friendships, and peer victimization. The former two factors are particularly relevant to the current discussion, and I summarize the authors' findings related to each below.

According to Ladd et al. (2009), "Peer rejection is typically defined as how disliked (relative to how liked) a child is by members of his or her peer group" (p. 326). With respect to classroom engagement, research has most clearly suggested that peer rejection may limit youths' opportunities for participation in two key ways: First, peer rejection inherently denies students full access to social resources in their classrooms; these students therefore participate less and in fewer classroom activities. Second, researchers have proposed that peer rejection damages students' beliefs about their own competence as well as their beliefs about the trustworthiness of others, both of which result in lower classroom engagement. Each of these outcomes threatens rejected youths'



academic achievement, as decreased engagement tends to result in less robust learning (Ladd, Herald-Brown, & Kochel, 2009).

Peer friendships, or relationships between two individuals, have the potential to both support and undermine students' engagement and learning. On the one hand, although researchers have not fully established relationships between the variables, past work suggests that peer friendships may function as sources of "certain 'provisions' that help [students] adapt or adjust to school" (Ladd, Herald-Brown, & Kochel, 2009, p. 336). Such supports can be academic, emotional, physical, or social. On the other hand, peer friendships may also be sources of conflict or distraction. Relational dynamics "such as conflict, rivalry, and betrayal" may "distract children from productive engagement in schoolwork, or interfere with their participation in scholastic activities" (p. 337). Youth are also likely to consider friends as models for "school-related behaviors and goals, and these actions and attitudes have the effect of encouraging or discouraging their participation in scholastic activities" (p. 338). Ladd et al. (2009) were careful to note that the factors described above — peer rejection/acceptance and peer friendships — do not operate separately. Rather, they continuously interact, complicating and amplifying one another.

**Curricula and learning materials.** Finally, the nature of classroom curricula and learning materials may powerfully influence youths' academic motivation, engagement, and achievement. More specifically, it matters whether classroom materials are interesting, self-selected, and culturally relevant. Below, I briefly consider each of these points in turn. In general, however, it suffices to say that when curricula can be described

in these ways (i.e., as interesting and culturally relevant), students tend to be more engaged and motivated to achieve.

Researchers have distinguished between two types of interest: situational interest and individual interest. According to Alderman (2008), “individual interest is a personal interest ... based on a deep level of knowledge that a student brings to the classroom. As such, it develops slowly over time [and] is relatively stable” (p. 245). By contrast, “situational interest results from some instructional activity or text material such as an interesting text, a science experiment, a computer simulation, or a learning activity relevant to students’ lives that triggers an interest” (Alderman, 2008, p. 245). If a situational interest in a topic persists over time, it may develop into a more stable, individual interest (Alderman, 2008; Hidi & Renninger, 2006; Schiefele, 2009). Both types of interest may contribute to youths’ increased motivation and engagement in the classroom, although individual interest tends to be more powerfully and consistently predictive of intrinsic motivation and school achievement (Alderman, 2008; Schiefele, 2009). In reading education, for example, researchers have demonstrated positive, independent relationships between student interest, engagement, and reading comprehension (e.g., Alexander, Kulikowich, & Jetton, 1994; Guthrie & Wigfield, 1997; Guthrie & Wigfield, 2000; Guthrie, 2004).

Given the strong relationship between situational interest and specific instructional contexts, teachers can most easily support students’ motivation and engagement by developing learning activities that seek to increase their situational interest in the curriculum. Effective instructional strategies for directly building situational and, eventually, individual interests among students have included: teachers’

explanations of their own interests in curricular topics (Bergin, 1999; Schiefele, 2009; Schunk, Pintrich, & Meece, 2008); classroom discussions of “practical implications of subject content and its relation to students’ everyday life” (Schiefele, 2009, p. 216); lessons that engage students in practical, problem-based, and hands-on activities (Hickey, 1997; Schiefele, 2009); and attempts to build connections between curricular content and students’ existing individual interests (Guthrie & Coddington, 2009; Meece, 1991; Schiefele, 2009). Concept-Oriented Reading Instruction (CORI) is one reading instructional framework that has embraced each of these elements and has been successful in increasing motivation and achievement among learners (Guthrie, Wigfield, & Perencevich, 2004).

Opportunities for student selection of learning materials comprise a second important feature of motivating and engaging classrooms. In general motivation research, scholars agree that students feel more agentic and engaged when they are able to exercise control over their learning (e.g., Deci & Ryan, 1985; Malone & Lepper, 1987). When students are encouraged to choose independent reading materials, for example, they are more likely to be interested and motivated to read those texts (Gambrell, 1996; Guthrie & Coddington, 2009; Ivey & Broaddus, 2001; Spaulding, 1992). Increased opportunities for student choice in the curriculum may also engage students who are otherwise disengaged or resistant to participation in school (Guthrie & Coddington, 2009; Lenters, 2006).

Lastly, the cultural relevance of a school curriculum — whether the curriculum reflects cultural and community knowledge, experiences, and values that are meaningful to students, and whether the curriculum engages or challenges social issues and inequalities that are prevalent in students’ lives — plays an important role in shaping

students' classroom motivation and engagement. Ladson-Billings (1995) and others (e.g., Duncan-Andrade & Morrell, 2008; Moll & Gonzalez, 2004; Moje & Hinchman, 2004; Schultz, 2008) have argued strongly and convincingly that culturally relevant and sustaining (Paris, 2012) curricula and pedagogy are essential for supporting all students' academic engagement and learning. Indeed, a growing body of research literature supports these assertions (e.g., Ebe, 2012; Feger, 2006; Tatum, 2006).

### **Motivational Concerns for Adolescents**

In general, as students grow older and gain more experience in school settings, their average levels of achievement motivation decrease (Anderman & Maehr, 1994; Lepper, Corpus, & Iyengar, 2005). Therefore, for adolescent students in particular, it is important to consider why this drop in motivation occurs and how curriculum and pedagogical practices in middle and high school settings must respond in order to support adolescent youths' academic motivation and achievement. For example, as more experienced students, adolescent youth bring longer histories of success or failure to their academic pursuits. For youth who have accumulated mostly failures over many years, it can be extremely difficult (and often pointless, from their perspectives) to maintain motivation to engage in classroom activities. In order to help these youth develop greater achievement motivation, it is important to provide new opportunities for success, to coach youth through these opportunities, and to respond to successes with motivating feedback (Alderman, 2008).

Research has also demonstrated that older youth make more distinctions between the effects of ability and effort on achievement (Alderman, 2008; Graham & Williams,

2009). Such distinctions can boost adolescent youths' motivation and achievement when they increase their effort to compensate for low ability. On the other hand, however, "if low achievement is attributed to ability, effort may be viewed as useless and students may actually decrease effort to protect self-worth" (Alderman, 2008, p. 41). Given evidence that older youth may be more susceptible to low ability attributions and cues (Barker & Graham, 1987; Graham & Williams, 2009), it is essential to provide coaching and feedback that emphasize the role of sustained effort in academic achievement. This also points to the importance of not tracking and labeling youth by ability, a practice that is both common in middle and secondary classrooms (Oakes, 2005) and detrimental to many youths' achievement motivation (Alderman, 2008; Graham & Williams, 2009).

As youth grow older, their social relationships and surroundings also begin to exert more influence on their self-perceptions and achievement motivations. Peer pressure and peer relationships become particularly important in adolescence, and youth draw on these parts of their lives to develop achievement attributions (Graham & Williams, 2009), self-efficacy beliefs (Schunk & Meece, 2006; Schunk & Pajares, 2009), expectancies for academic success (Wigfield, Tonks, & Klauda, 2009), and values for learning (Ryan, 2003; Wigfield, Tonks, Klauda, 2009). Many students – particularly youth who have been academically and socially marginalized — also become increasingly aware of social and institutional barriers to success as they advance through the grades; as a result, these youth may resist engaging (or actively refuse to engage) in classroom activities (Lenters, 2006; McCarthy & Moje, 2002).

## **A Focus on Self-Efficacy and Achievement**

To this point, I have demonstrated (a) that motivation and engagement, in general, are essential for students' learning in schools, and (b) that the social and contextual variables that influence students' general motivation are varied and complex. The current study, however, focuses on just one component of achievement motivation: self-efficacy. As a consistent predictor of self-regulation, academic achievement, and classroom learning, self-efficacy has been an important construct in educational studies for over three decades. In the following sections, I describe key features of self-efficacy, the importance of self-efficacy for academic achievement, and major sources of self-efficacy beliefs.

First introduced in Bandura's (1977a, 1977b) early psychological work around social cognition, self-efficacy has been a powerful, oft-studied construct in fields ranging from education to business and athletics (Schunk & Pajares, 2009). As defined by Schunk and Pajares (2009), "self-efficacy refers to [an individual or group's] perceived capabilities for learning or performing actions at designated levels" (p. 35). For example, a learner with an elevated sense of self-efficacy in a given context believes she can successfully accomplish learning or performance goals in that context. Theories of self-efficacy are concerned with understanding not only how we come to feel confident in our abilities with respect to specific tasks, but also how our confidence ultimately influences our task performance.

As a motivational construct, self-efficacy is both task-specific and context-bound (Bandura, 1997; Schunk & Pajares, 2009). For example, an individual may feel self-efficacious when reading one type of textual passage but not another, or one might have a higher sense of self-efficacy in a reading classroom than in a mathematics classroom.

“Self-efficacy beliefs are cognitive, goal-referenced, relatively context-specific, and future-oriented judgements of competence that are malleable due to their task dependence” (Schunk & Pajares, 2009, p. 39). This quality makes self-efficacy distinctly different from other “self”-related variables like self-concept and self-esteem, which are “normative, typically aggregated, hierarchically structured, and past-oriented self-perceptions that are more stable due to their sense of generality” (Schunk & Pajares, 2009, p. 39).

In schools, students’ self-efficacy beliefs have important implications for their motivation, self-regulation, academic achievement, and learning. In particular, students who demonstrate higher self-efficacy are more likely to select more challenging tasks; pursue more challenging goals; expend greater energy to complete tasks successfully; show greater self-regulation, persistence, and use of learning strategies; and show higher levels of achievement. Unsurprisingly, students with lower self-efficacy tend to select less challenging tasks or avoid challenging tasks; show decreased motivation, energy, and persistence in related tasks; and demonstrate lower levels of academic achievement (Guthrie, Coddington, & Wigfield, 2009; McTigue, Washburn, & Liew, 2009; Schunk & Pajares, 2009; Schunk & Zimmerman, 2007).

For example, in a study of fourth, seventh, and tenth-grade students’ reading and writing achievement, Shell, Colvin, and Bruning (1997) found “substantial differences between the beliefs of high and low achievers” (p. 395). High achievers, in comparison to low achievers, generally expressed higher levels of self-efficacy in reading and writing. Not only did lower achievers show lower self-efficacy, but they also placed more value on reading and writing achievement. In other words, although lower achievers arguably

saw more power in reading and writing than did higher achievers, they did not believe they could access that power, leading to a decrease in motivation to read and write.

In literacy education, a youth's sense of self-efficacy with respect to reading and writing may significantly influence the kinds of literate activities in which he chooses to engage both inside and outside the classroom. For example, Smith and Wilhelm (2004) found that middle and high school-aged boys "embraced [literate] activities in which they were competent or through which they felt they could demonstrate improvement toward competence" (pp. 456-457); on the other hand, the boys resisted reading and writing activities in which they did not feel confident, such as reading school textbooks. This finding highlights one way in which a student's sense of self might interfere with academic (particularly literacy) motivation and achievement.

### **Sources and Development of Self-Efficacy Beliefs**

Empirical studies have identified four key sources of self-efficacy, or four key informational sources from which individuals draw to construct their self-efficacy beliefs. These sources include: actual task performances, vicarious experiences, forms of social persuasion, and physiological cues (Alderman, 2008; Schunk & Pajares, 2009). Readers will note that some of these sources — particularly vicarious experiences and social persuasion — closely parallel elements of the classroom contexts for youth motivation and engagement described above.

Individuals who develop self-efficacy beliefs based on task performance focus on the nature of their past successes or failures: on similar tasks, how competently have they performed previously? Perhaps unsurprisingly, individuals who have experienced more



successes in the past are likely to feel more self-efficacious in the present (Alderman, 2008; Schunk & Pajares, 2009). Vicarious experiences affect individuals' self-efficacy through observation and modeling: how successful are others, and what strategies or skills do they demonstrate? When individuals see others successfully accomplish a particular task, they are more likely to feel able to accomplish the task themselves (Alderman, 2008; Schunk & Hanson, 1985; Schunk & Pajares, 2009); this is especially true when the actors are peers or otherwise similar in skill and position (Schunk, 1995). Social persuasion refers to outside encouragement or discouragement that affects individuals' self-efficacy beliefs. Verbal encouragement from a teacher may increase a student's self-efficacy, for example, while verbal discouragement may lower self-efficacy (Alderman, 2008). Finally, physiological cues like increased physical anxiety or nervousness tend to negatively affect self-efficacy beliefs (Alderman, 2008; Bandura, 1997; Schunk & Pajares, 2009). Prior task performance is the most influential source of information in the development of self-efficacy beliefs, followed by various experiences, social persuasion, and physiological cues, respectively (Alderman, 2008, p. 72).

It is important to note that individuals' evaluations of the above informational sources – not the sources themselves – are of primary importance in the development of self-efficacy beliefs (Alderman, 2008; Pajares & Schunk, 2002; Schunk & Pajares, 2009). For example, we might expect a student's failure to comprehend a reading passage to negatively influence her self-efficacy with respect to similar reading tasks. However, if she interprets her failure as a result of limited effort rather than a lack of competence, her self-efficacy likely will not suffer. Furthermore, although researchers have most frequently identified the factors listed above, they are not the only ones that contribute to

self-efficacy beliefs. Different family, social, and cultural variables like home learning environments, parental education, and peer relationships may also influence self-efficacy development (Alderman, 2008; Bandura, Barbaranelli, Caprara, & Pastorelli, 1996; Schunk & Pajares, 2009; Usher & Pajares, 2006). There is also evidence that multiple sources of self-efficacy beliefs interact, yielding different motivational outcomes in different individuals (Alderman, 2008; Smith, 2001).

### **A Source of Social Persuasion: Privileged Literacy Forms and Practices in Middle and High School Classrooms**

In part, students develop motivation and self-efficacy beliefs in relation to the kinds of learning materials and tasks that are prevalent in their classrooms. In the next several sections, I will (a) describe the types of literacies and literacy practices that are most often valued and privileged in middle and high school classrooms, (b) consider some of the processes through which these practices are upheld and legitimated, (c) discuss how these processes influence youths' self-perceptions as learners, their identities as readers, and their learning outcomes, and (d) review a sample of empirical and theoretical work that has sought to challenge the current dominance of a small set of reading and literacy practices in school spaces.

**Dominant models of literacy practice.** To understand the kinds of literacy and reading practices that are often privileged in middle and high school classrooms in the United States, it is useful to begin by considering how a large number of educators understand reading as a general process or activity. In many reading and language arts classrooms, an “autonomous model” of literacy forms the basis for most curricular and

pedagogical choices (Alvermann, 2009; Street, 1984/1995). First theorized by Street (1984), the autonomous model:

tends ... to be based on the 'essay-text' form of literacy and to generalize broadly from what is in fact a narrow, culture-specific literacy practice ... The model assumes a single direction in which literacy development can be traced, and associates it with 'progress', 'civilisation', individual liberty and social mobility. It attempts to distinguish literacy from schooling. It isolates literacy as an independent variable and then claims to be able to study its consequences. These consequences are classically represented in terms of economic 'take off' or in terms of cognitive skills. (Street, 1984/1995, pp. 1-2)

Put more simply, "The autonomous model ... views reading and writing as neutral processes that are largely explained by individual variations in cognitive and physiological functioning. It is a view that assumes a universal set of reading and writing skills for decoding and encoding printed text" (Alvermann, 2009, pp. 15-16). For schools and teachers who approach the act of reading as an autonomous process, to be literate is to be able to engage in particular ways of thinking and drawing meaning from printed text that are consistently important in any institutional or cultural context.

This mindset frames literacy as a stable, "neutral technology" (Street, 1984/1995, p. 1) that is mastered through the use of a specific set of cognitive tools. As a result, classroom reading instruction based on an autonomous model of literacy often focuses predominantly on teaching and learning cognitive reading strategies (like making predictions, asking questions of text, monitoring comprehension, and summarizing information), developing students' reading fluency, building students' vocabularies and

knowledge of word roots, and building other forms of background knowledge (Alvermann, Gillis, & Phelps, 2012). An underlying assumption of such work is that the reading skills and strategies that these learning activities target will enable youth to become better readers in general, regardless of the social milieu in which they are situated. The demands of standardized assessments and educational standards (e.g., the Common Core State Standards) tend to sustain instructional practices based on an autonomous model of literacy, as these accountability measures emphasize progressive, developmental learning of reading skills and strategies.

An autonomous model of literacy stands in contrast to what Street (1995) has termed an “ideological model,” which “assumes that the meaning of literacy depends upon the social institutions in which it is embedded” (Street, 1995, p. 8). An ideological model of literacy recognizes that literacies are multiple, constructed and constrained by social practices, and fundamentally tied to social values and politics. The educational implications of this perspective on literacy are extensive, demanding that teachers of reading and language arts expand their instruction beyond discrete skills and strategies; incorporate a wide range of texts and text types into their curricula; acknowledge and critique the social and historical contexts that authorize different literacies; and, perhaps most importantly, enable youth to engage in different literacy practices in classroom spaces. In other words, an ideological model of literacy precludes reading curricula and pedagogical practices that assume that being literate requires only particular forms of cognitive engagement with particular kinds of texts. However, this is not the approach to literacy teaching and learning that many youth encounter in middle and high schools.

Rather, many classrooms limit youths' literacy learning to activities that privilege specific kinds of texts and ways of engaging with texts.

**Text types and means of engagement.** Given the prevalence of the autonomous model of literacy in schools, it is unsurprising that reading practices in middle and secondary school classrooms generally reflect an overwhelming focus on traditional print texts. Depending on the content area, such classroom texts typically include trade books, literary anthologies, and textbooks with occasional supplements from journalistic sources like newspapers and magazines (Wade & Moje, 2000). Textbooks, “a bastion of secondary subject area instruction” (Sheridan-Thomas, 2008, p. 165), are particularly central in high school settings, but are nonetheless common in late elementary and middle school contexts, particularly as youth begin to encounter more focused content instruction. In English language arts (ELA) classrooms, textual materials typically include novels, short stories, poetry, plays, and other literary texts. Youth in social studies classrooms often read historical documents and other primary sources. Agricultural and vocational courses depend on various field manuals and other technical texts. Such a list of texts that are common or unique to particular content learning areas could go on. However, while the organization and content of textual materials inevitably vary by subject area (Alvermann, Gillis, & Phelps, 2012), a common interest in traditional print texts remains (Sheridan-Thomas, 2008; Wade & Moje, 2000).

In addition, researchers have identified particular genres<sup>1</sup> of print text that are essential to the work of reading and writing in middle and secondary schools. Including genres like recounts, narratives, reports, explanations, and expositions, these texts require that youth be familiar with and able to reproduce the organizational and linguistic conventions (e.g., the use of transitions and nominalization) that characterize each in both written and oral texts (Schleppegrell, 2004). Furthermore, youth must understand the purpose and audience for each genre, as well as when it is appropriate to write and speak in particular ways (Martin & Rose, 2008; Schleppegrell, 2004). Dominant genres like narratives and expositions are prevalent not only in classroom curricula, but also in high-stakes, standardized assessments of reading and writing (for example, the reading portion of the National Assessment of Educational Progress). Therefore, students' understanding of these text types affects their success in both local classroom and larger institutional contexts.

In many classrooms, the ways in which youth are taught and permitted to engage with textual materials are likewise limited. With respect to reading pedagogy, concerns for supporting students' reading comprehension are paramount in most middle and secondary school contexts. To this end, teachers often focus their reading instruction on teaching and modeling cognitive reading strategies, as well as on using comprehension tools like reading guides and graphic organizers. Youth are expected to learn and engage

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<sup>1</sup> As Schleppegrell (2004) notes, "*Genre* is a term used to refer to particular text or discourse types" (p. 82). Genres are defined not only by organizational and textual features, but also by how they "serve specific social purposes" (Schleppegrell, 2004, p. 83). Each "may have infinite manifestations and is always changing and evolving" depending on social context (Schleppegrell, 2004, p. 82), but each also refers to a set of general organizational, grammatical, and functional features that differentiate it as a particular, purposeful type of text.

in these practices independently during textbook and other reading. As students read classroom texts, for example, they may be expected to make predictions about the texts, ask questions of the texts and their authors, make connections to prior knowledge, create mental or visual representations of the texts, and summarize the texts' main ideas (Brown, 2008; Underwood & Pearson, 2004). Teachers assess students' mastery of such strategies by requiring that they make their cognitive processes visible — for example, by writing predictions, questions, or connections in the texts' margins (e.g., Nokes & Dole, 2004).

Also in the interest of reading comprehension, many educators (usually reading teachers, but also some content area teachers) require students to engage in learning activities designed to improve their reading fluency and vocabulary knowledge. These include activities like repeated, timed oral and silent readings of independent-level print texts to build fluency (e.g., Curtis, 2004) and practice with independent word-learning strategies (e.g., using context clues) to increase vocabulary knowledge (Graves, 2006). Youth are also encouraged and required to engage in independent, silent reading as a means of increasing interest and engagement in reading, building vocabulary and background knowledge, and building reading fluency (Alvermann, Gillis, & Phelps, 2012).

While many middle and high school classrooms tend to focus on students' cognitive engagement with mostly print texts, there are exceptions to these general trends insofar as individual teachers, researchers, and sometimes schools make commitments to engaging youth in other forms of literacy and textual work. For example, Dockter, Haug, and Lewis (2010) have described a digital media literacy-based curriculum in which high

school youth developed critical reading and literacy skills through analyses of “multiple media texts and genres” (p. 419), as well as through their own documentary film productions. The researchers found that the non-traditional classroom curricula provided youth with opportunities to develop literacy skills through intellectually challenging and personally engaging learning activities. Such accounts are promising, providing examples of ways in which language arts and reading teachers can move beyond print-based texts while nonetheless meeting benchmarks for students’ literacy learning.

**Defining reading proficiency.** The teaching and learning activities described above presuppose particular conceptualizations of reading comprehension — particularly views of comprehension that focus on using cognitive strategies to uncover, understand, and personally connect with textual meaning as intended by an author. Such perspectives on reading comprehension do not necessarily require that youth learn to identify, question, or critique the ideological or social contexts in which authors write and readers read; neither do they require or encourage youth to engage in a range of different literacy practices with diverse text forms and genres. That many classrooms should adopt a predominantly cognitive, uncritical approach to literacy practice and instruction is unsurprising given the prevalence of autonomous models of literacy in middle and secondary schools.

These views on reading comprehension and the kinds of texts and reading practices that are valued in classrooms shape definitions of reading proficiency in middle and high school spaces. As O’Brien, Stewart, and Beach (2009) have described, reading “proficiency is typically defined in terms of efficiency of processing, specifically the



coordination of reading subcomponents such as decoding and rapid word recognition skills and the effective use of phonemic, orthographic, lexical, syntactic, and semantic systems” (p. 80). Furthermore, “from the predominant view, proficient or ‘skilled’ readers are defined as people who efficiently and automatically use skills and strategies, capitalizing on strong subcomponent processes and compensating for weaker ones to comprehend what they read” (O’Brien, Stewart, & Beach, 2009, pp. 80-81). Such definitions of reading proficiency do not consider whether youth are capable of critically engaging with texts or whether they can do so with multiple text types, points that are clearly reflected in high-stakes, standardized assessments of reading ability, which require youth to demonstrate understanding of “short passages selected not because they are engaging but because of their bland neutrality and freedom from bias that might favor a particular reader’s background knowledge” (O’Brien, Stewart, & Beach, 2009, p. 81). Such definitions of reading proficiency ignore the situated nature of reading practices (Baker & Luke, 1991; Bloome, Carter, Christian, Otto, & Shuart-Faris, 2005; Lewis, 2001; McHoul, 1991) and risk labeling youth as “basic” or “struggling” readers even when they are capable of critically engaging in other sophisticated literacy practices with a range of print, digital, and multimodal text types (O’Brien, Stewart, & Beach, 2009). These definitions also threaten to “marginalize and contain students’ substantive [and critical] engagement” with classroom texts (Anagnostopoulos, 2003, p. 177).

### **Processes of Legitimation**

In the preceding sections, I have sought to describe some of the literacy practices and forms — particularly the kinds of texts and ways of engaging with texts — that are often

privileged in middle and high school classrooms. However, it is important to understand that these practices are not naturally valuable; neither are they inherently important to the work of education and schooling. Rather, these forms of literate practice have gained favor over time as people with various social and institutional interests have encouraged (and indeed enforced) their adoption and reproduction in schools.

As educational historians and curriculum scholars (e.g., Apple, 2000; Kliebard, 2004; Symcox, 2002) remind us, classroom texts and other learning materials are neither neutral nor apolitical. Indeed, every aspect of a classroom curriculum is implicated by particular social and institutional ideologies that serve to legitimate and uphold existing systems of social order and power. As Allan Luke (1991, 1996) has demonstrated, literacy and reading curricula are no different. Historically, classroom reading materials and pedagogies have supported and reproduced ideologies related to individualism and capitalism (Luke, 1991); to literacy as a neutral, procedural process (Luke, 1991; Street, 1984/1995); and to the mastery of specific literacy practices or text types as a way to automatically and “directly inculcate ‘power’ (Luke, 1996, p. 315). These instructional programs have also produced or reinscribed youth as raced, classed, and otherwise socially positioned subjects. Reading curricula have accomplished these tasks in large part by perpetuating dominant discourses that dictate what counts as knowledge, reading, and academically literate practice in classroom spaces. In the following section, I describe several of the discursive and ideological practices that act to define and enforce what it means to be a reader in schools. To structure the discussion, I consider processes that occur at two levels of social organization, beginning with the work of educational

policymakers and publishers before narrowing my focus to the discursive productions in local classroom interactions.

**Political and institutional influences.** In many cases, before teachers and students even enter their classrooms, what will “count” as reading and writing in their daily learning activities has already been determined — at least in part. State teacher preparation standards dictate what middle and high school reading professionals and other content teachers must know about reading instruction, and therefore what and how they will likely choose to teach in their own classrooms. Similarly, state-mandated student learning standards require that youth learn to engage in particular reading practices — like identifying “main ideas” — with particular kinds of texts. Some sets of standards (for example, the Common Core Standards which have been adopted by a majority of the United States) even provide lists of required or “exemplar” texts for classroom use. The politicians, policymakers, educators, and academics who write state teaching and learning standards draw on their own assumptions and beliefs about what constitutes “good,” “rigorous,” or appropriately “academic” reading and writing to shape the basic curricula of middle and secondary schools. In this way, their ideologies with respect to literacy help to define how both teachers and students are able to engage in literate practices in school. Very real material conditions — including considerations related to teachers’ licensure and promotions, as well as contingent state and national government funding — compel teachers and schools to closely adhere to student learning standards and the particular reading and writing practices that they require.

Publishers of textbooks and other educational materials likewise look to state-mandated student learning standards to determine what contents their materials will include, as well as how they will conceptualize and represent successful reading and writing (Luke, 1991). Publishers explicitly and implicitly identify valued ways of reading and writing through the reading and writing practices that they build into their student texts (e.g., the kinds of reading comprehension questions they include throughout or at the conclusion of chapters); through the teaching activities they suggest in teachers' instructional guides; and through the kinds of textual materials they choose to publish and distribute in the first place (Luke, 1991). It is important to note that both policymakers' and publishers' beliefs about reading education standards are often motivated by economic interests. Many policymakers, for example, aim to promote reading curricula that will make students economically competitive — or that will ensure that graduates have the literacy skills necessary to enter particular sectors of the workforce (Luke, 1996). Meanwhile, publishers include the kinds of teaching and learning content that will be most marketable (and that will, therefore, generate the most substantial financial profits) (Luke, 1991).

**Discourse in classroom contexts.** In specific classrooms, several curricular, contextual, and social characteristics contribute to definitions of classroom reading and reading practice. First, and perhaps most obviously, what "counts" as reading practice in a particular classroom space is influenced by the learning activities in which students are asked or required to engage — including both individual and group work, as well as formative and summative class assignments (Baker, 1991; Bloome, Carter, Christian,

Otto, & Stuart-Faris, 2005). Requiring students to read specific kinds of texts (e.g., print textbooks, novels, or various digital texts) and to engage with those texts in specific kinds of ways communicates that those texts and practices are especially valuable (Baker, 1991; Bloome et al., 2005; Green & Meyer, 1991). By extension, curricular silences are also important; not requiring youth to learn or engage in particular reading practices — particularly practices in which youth already engage — may signal that those practices are less important or not worthy of instructional time. And, one step further, actively rejecting texts and reading practices from inclusion in the classroom may communicate that such texts and practices are not only unimportant ways of reading and learning, but indeed opposite to what youth should or need to learn in school. In these ways, the classroom reading curriculum — both explicit and "hidden" (Apple, 2000) — continually makes claims about the reading forms and practices that are and should be privileged in schools. As Baker (1991) notes, “Students’ own conceptions of what ‘reading’ is, and their sense of knowing whether they can do it, can only come from experience with particular instances of reading being done” (p. 163). To the extent that a classroom curriculum expands or limits youths’ opportunities for engaging in “particular instances of reading being done,” it similarly expands or limits their understandings of what counts as reading in school.

Teachers and students also construct and negotiate definitions of reading and reading practice through classroom conversations and other interactions. Through close analysis of talk and other discourse, numerous scholars (e.g., Baker, 1991; Bloome et al., 2005; Green & Meyer, 1991; Lewis, 2001) have demonstrated how classroom conversations allow teachers to position, model, and assert the value of particular ways of

reading. Bloome and colleagues (2005), for instance, highlighted how one seventh-grade language arts teacher used questioning techniques to encourage her students to move beyond reading a poem for content alone and to “reflect on their own experiences and sociocultural histories” as a central part of the reading process (p. 98). In this case, the teacher “[was] providing the students with a model of how to read that contrasts with the cultural models of classroom literacy practices that dominate much schooling” (Bloome et al., 2005, p. 98). In other instances, teacher or student talk can serve to support and reinscribe dominant beliefs about classroom reading — for example, by questioning students in ways that indicate that the “point of reading is to be questioned about how (well) one has done it” (Baker, 1991, p. 165). In all cases, students’ and teachers’ understandings of reading and reading practice emerge and change as classroom participants engage in and discuss different reading practices over time (Bloome et al., 2005; Green & Meyer, 1991). So too do classroom discussions and reading practices shape how students see themselves in relation to reading and reading competency (Bloome et al., 2005).

The discursive processes through which classroom curricula, learning practices, and language come to shape definitions of reading and reading practice reflect the powers of language and social action to create our social and institutional surroundings. As Wetherell (2001) has stated, “A central point discourse researchers make is that language is constructive. It is constitutive of social life. Discourse builds objects, worlds, minds and social relations. It doesn’t just reflect them” (p. 16). She continues:

As accounts and discourses become available and widely shared, they become social realities to be reckoned with; they become efficacious in future events. The

account enters the discursive economy to be circulated, exchanged, stifled, marginalized or, perhaps, comes to dominate over other possible accounts and is thus marked as the ‘definitive truth.’” (p. 16)

Through their use of language, their use of cultural tools and artifacts, and their participation in different literacy practices over time, classroom participants create and recreate “figured worlds”: “socially and culturally constructed realm[s] of interpretation in which particular characters and actors are recognized, significance is assigned to certain acts, and particular outcomes are valued over others” (Holland, Lachicotte, Skinner, & Cain, 1998, p. 52). Figured worlds of classroom reading are the sociocultural fields in which teachers and students both recognize and negotiate the reading materials and practices that will hold value in their educational space. However, because teachers typically have the institutionally sanctioned power to moderate and control language use and production in school, they also have more power to either maintain or disrupt existing figured worlds of reading in the classroom.

### **Discursive Influences on Reader Identity and Self-Perception**

I have now described some of the ways in which reading and, more broadly, literacy practices are defined, valued, and constrained in middle and high school classroom contexts. But why do these processes matter for adolescent students? How do these discursive acts of positioning and legitimation affect how youth perceive themselves as readers and learners? And how do these acts affect how youth actually do learn (or are allowed to learn) in schools?

To be sure, the narrowing of school curricula to privilege only a small subset of available reading practices harms students by restricting their opportunities to demonstrate proficiencies and to become engaged in meaningful academic work. Perspectives on reading practice that privilege autonomous models of literacy, that focus on narrow definitions of reading comprehension, and that limit youths' critical engagement with different texts preclude the kinds of deep, socially aware reading and learning that many educators strive for (e.g., Anagnostopoulos, 2003). Furthermore, restricted classroom reading curricula offer fewer opportunities for all youth to become interested and engaged in learning. It is not simply that the language and literacy practices that are often recognized and legitimated in schools reflect (or, indeed, are based on) White, middle-class, and Western ways of knowing the world — although this is a destructive and persistent reality (e.g., Duncan-Andrade & Morrell, 2008; Craig & Washington, 2006; Delpit, 1995; Heath, 1982). In addition, adolescent youth who have spent much of their childhoods engaging with multimodal and digital texts are likely to consider strictly print-based literacy curricula to be uninteresting or unimportant (Wilber, 2008).

Negative outcomes associated with limited classroom definitions of reading extend much further than concerns with interest and engagement, however, in fact influencing how youth themselves are positioned and identified as different kinds of readers or non-readers. The discursive processes that (de)legitimate various reading and literacy practices in classrooms also create students as subjects with particular identities in relation to those practices (McCarthy & Moje, 2002). Some youth resist these subjectivities (e.g., Sutherland, 2005); others may accept them as more long-term



components of their academic identities as discourses “provide [youth] with a way of making sense of [themselves], [their] motives, experiences and reactions” (Wetherell, 2001, pp. 23-24). In either case, the discourses that mark certain reading practices as more or less valuable in a classroom also work to inscribe youth as individuals with more or less competency and power — as readers who are more or less literate — within the classroom's dominant ideological regime.

As Hall (1990) writes:

Cultural identity ... is a matter of ‘becoming’ as well as ‘being’. It belongs to the future as much as to the past. It is not something which already exists, transcending place, time, history and culture. Cultural identities come from somewhere, have histories. But, like everything which is historical, they undergo constant transformation. Far from being eternally fixed in some essentialised past, they are subject to the continuous ‘play’ of history, culture and power. (p. 225)

In this sense, adolescent students’ identities as readers are continually shaped by the sociohistorical and cultural discourses of literacy and reading that characterize and inhabit their classrooms. Often, youth who do not take up dominant or “traditional” school reading practices are positioned as either “struggling readers,” “resistant readers,” or non-readers, regardless of the other literacies they might demonstrate in classroom and community spaces (O’Brien, Stewart, & Beach, 2009). School and classroom discourses of reading “constitute” struggling youth based on how and whether their ways of reading adhere to dominant definitions of reading practice (cf. Franzak, 2004; Mehan, 2001, p. 361). As a result, such youth may become disengaged, alienated, and less likely to achieve academically (Guthrie & Coddington, 2009). Furthermore, narrow definitions of

literacy, reading, and readers — definitions that do not leave space for youth with diverse reading interests and practices — may prevent many students from taking on literate identities beyond those which they have already developed or which they have been given. As Lewis & del Valle (2009) note, a sociocultural literacy “perspective holds that when the experiences, perceptions, and relationships students value are not acknowledged, they often learn that literacy is an exclusive, limiting activity that diminishes their efforts to construct expanded identities” (p. 310).

### **Opportunities for Rearticulating Dominant Literacy Practices**

Thus far, I have attempted to demonstrate how narrow definitions of academic reading and literacy harm youth in several ways: by limiting their opportunities to demonstrate reading proficiency, by constructing youth as deficient or otherwise non-normative readers, and by reducing their opportunities and motivation to become meaningfully engaged in classroom learning. In response to such outcomes, educators and scholars in both literacy and curriculum studies have suggested several alternatives to educational models that privilege particular ways of reading, writing, and learning. In this concluding section, I briefly describe three such perspectives, including work related to culturally relevant pedagogy, critical literacy education, and new and multiliteracies. Because the theory and research bases related to each of these topics are extensive, it is not possible to review them all in detail. Instead, I have attempted to provide a summary sketch of each, followed by a brief discussion of how these three perspectives challenge narrow definitions of reading and literacy curricula.

**Culturally relevant and sustaining pedagogy.** Broadly, teachers who engage in culturally relevant or culturally responsive pedagogy aim to develop teaching practices that not only respond to differences in youths' cultural backgrounds, identities, and community practices, but that also draw on students' existing funds of knowledge (Moll & Gonzalez, 2004) in order to create more engaging and productive classrooms. In the context of literacy learning, Moje and Hinchman (2004) have identified three common "perspectives on what it means to engage in culturally responsive pedagogy" (p. 323). These include: using "students' experiences as a bridge to conventional content and literacy learning"; "teach[ing] youth how to navigate cultural and discursive communities"; and "draw[ing] from students' experiences to challenge and reshape the academic-content knowledge and literacy practices of the curriculum" (Moje & Hinchman, 2004, p. 323). These perspectives reflect tenets of culturally relevant pedagogy as originally outlined by Ladson-Billings (1995): specifically, pedagogical commitments to helping students achieve academically, develop cultural competence, and engage in cultural critique. Importantly, culturally relevant pedagogies are not intended to limit school curricula to only those topics that interest youth. To the contrary, culturally relevant pedagogues have maintained that culturally relevant teaching must include academic achievement as a key measure of the instructional program's success (Ladson-Billings, 1995; Moje & Hinchman, 2004).

In recent years, other scholars have proposed revisions to Ladson-Billings's model of culturally relevant pedagogy, arguing that more must be done to actively support youths' linguistic and cultural identities in school. Paris (2012), in particular, called for a turn toward "culturally sustaining pedagogy":

The term *culturally sustaining* requires that our pedagogies be more than responsive of or relevant to the cultural experiences and practices of young people – it requires that they support young people in sustaining the cultural and linguistic competence of their communities while simultaneously offering access to dominant cultural competence. Culturally sustaining pedagogy, then, has as its explicit goal supporting multilingualism and multiculturalism in practice and perspective for students and teachers. That is, culturally sustaining pedagogy seeks to perpetuate and foster – to sustain – linguistic, literature, and cultural pluralism as part of the democratic project of schooling. (p. 95)

Although culturally relevant pedagogy, as originally conceived, includes attention to students’ cultural competencies and their understanding of issues of social access and power, supporters of culturally sustaining pedagogy have pushed for a more direct, explicit focus on cultural “maintenance and cultural critique” (Paris, 2012, p. 95). Such a perspective has strong implications for the kinds of literacies and texts that might be included in classrooms – especially in communities with large populations of racial minorities, working class individuals and families, and non-native English speakers. In a culturally sustaining classroom, students who identify with these groups would likely read texts and engage in literacy practices that challenge traditionally “schooled” literacies.

**Critical literacy education.** Like culturally relevant and sustaining pedagogues, critical literacy educators are also centrally committed to identifying, critiquing, and overturning social inequities while engaging youth in rigorous academic work. Luke

(2012) defines critical literacy instruction as “an overtly political orientation to teaching and learning and to the cultural, ideological, and sociolinguistic content of the curriculum. It is focused on the uses of literacy for social justice in marginalized and disenfranchised communities” (p. 5). Practitioners of critical literacy are concerned with how texts position readers, how readers position texts, and how texts reflect, instantiate, and reinstantiate discourses, ideologies, and power relations in the world. Critical literacy pedagogues ask “how texts and discourses work, where, with what consequences, and in whose interests” (Luke, 2012, p. 5), as well as how multiple texts represent different perspectives in necessarily biased ways (Behrman, 2006). Critical literacy educators work to challenge political, social, and economic inequities and oppressive power relationships that are manifest in the print and multimedia texts they analyze, and they help youth engage in similar work based on interests and concerns in their own lives and communities (Berhman, 2006; Dockter, Haug, & Lewis, 2010). Together, these practices reflect what Freire termed “reading the word and the world” (Freire & Macedo, 1987).

**New, multiple, and multimodal literacies.** Finally, a range of theory and scholarship surrounding “new,” multiple, and multimodal literacies has worked to reconceptualize what counts as literacy and literate practice both inside and outside of schools. The New London Group (1996), a group of scholars interested in the role of literacy in an increasingly globalized and technologized world, sought to complicate definitions of literacy based on “teaching and learning to read and write in page-bound, official, standard forms of the national language” (pp. 60-61) and “to broaden this understanding of literacy and literacy teaching and learning to include negotiating a

multiplicity of discourses” (p. 61). These authors and others (e.g., Gee, 2003; Kress, 2003; Xu, 2008) have argued that literacy is most appropriately understood as a process of making meaning with any print, digital, visual, audio, spatial, gestural, or multimodal text. Furthermore, new literacy scholars have emphasized the social and contextual situatedness of literacy practices, arguing that literacy practices are “social practices ‘involving socially recognized ways of doing things’” (Xu, 2008, p. 41, quoting Lankshear & Knobel, 2007, p. 4). Therefore, within this framework of literacy and literacy learning, it is nearly impossible (and ill-advised) to prescribe one way of teaching and engaging in literate practice. Instead, classroom curricula based on new or multiple literacy perspectives encourage youth to engage with multiple, multimodal texts in different contexts and discourses in order to make deeper sense of the word and the world.

**Summary.** Perspectives from culturally relevant and sustaining pedagogy, critical literacy education, and new literacy studies offer several alternatives to reading pedagogies that privilege narrow definitions of reading and reading practice. Each of these frameworks rejects a conceptualization of literacy that depends on cognitive interactions with print texts alone. Instead, they call for deep engagement with a range of multimodal texts while recognizing that literacy and reading are fundamentally social practices. Furthermore, these frameworks place students’ interests, knowledges, and community commitments at the center of literacy teaching and learning, in contrast to pedagogies that select instructional materials and activities without regard for their cultural relevance. And finally, these frameworks ask youth to engage in textual analysis

and critique, a practice that acts to disrupt the very discourses that impose narrow definitions of reading in “traditional” literacy curricula. It is important to note that each of these alternatives to dominant reading pedagogies have been shown to be effective means of both engaging learners and promoting academic achievement (see, for example, Dockter, Haug, & Lewis, 2010, with reference to critical literacy; Garth-McCullough, 2008, with reference to culturally relevant pedagogy; Xu, 2008, regarding multiliteracy education).

### **Chapter Summary**

In this chapter, I have provided an overview of the key theoretical and empirical literature that forms the context for my study. I have demonstrated that positive learner identity and self-efficacy are important factors for academic achievement, and that these factors are strongly influenced by the social contexts of schools. Positive reader identity and increased reading self-efficacy have both been associated with increased reading achievement. A range of social and contextual variables, including classroom discourse, curriculum, pedagogy, and feedback/social persuasion from teachers and peers, influences students’ reader identities and reading self-efficacy.

I have argued that social ideologies and classroom discourses of reading and literacy — including representations of how different kinds of texts and literacy practices are valued in classrooms — are among the forms of social feedback that shape students’ self-perceptions of themselves as readers and learners. When classrooms privilege particular literacy forms and practices through curricular and pedagogical choices, which are themselves affected by broader social and institutional ideologies related to reading

and literacy, they risk alienating and disengaging youth whose understandings of literacy are different. Teachers can disrupt limiting discourses of reading by incorporating more diverse literacy practices and text types into the curriculum, assigning value to reading practices that students identify as meaningful, and engaging in textual analysis and critique.



## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **Methodology**

#### **Chapter Overview**

This chapter presents the methodological framework for the current study, including overviews of: guiding theories and methodologies; procedures for participant selection and recruitment; and methods of data collection, analysis, and interpretation. As I have described in previous chapters, in this study I explored relationships between discourses of reading and students' self-perceptions as readers in a high school English classroom. As a critical study, the purpose of this research was not only to describe how classroom discourses affected students' self-perceptions as readers, but also to interrogate the dominant educational ideologies that motivated these discourses. Specific research questions for this inquiry included:

1. How do students perceive themselves as readers?
2. How are classroom reading practices and goals discursively defined by curriculum and pedagogy?
3. How do discursive definitions of reading influence individual students' reader identities and self-efficacy?

I sought to answer these questions using mixed methods within a critical ethnographic framework. I collected and analyzed data from multiple quantitative and qualitative sources, including fieldnotes based on participant observations, classroom artifacts, audio-video recordings of classroom activities, semi-structured interviews, surveys, and students' academic records. My primary methods of analysis included descriptive

statistical analysis, critical discourse analysis, and constant comparative analysis. In the following sections, I describe each component of the research design in further detail.

### **Theoretical Frameworks**

In the current study, I seek to expand our understanding of relationships between ideologies of reading, classroom discourses of reading, and students' identities and self-efficacy as readers. To do so, I adopt a theoretical framework that places self-efficacy and reader identity development at the intersection of discourse, cognition, and society. I draw most broadly on Teun van Dijk's (1998, 2009) conceptualization of "the discourse-cognition-society triangle," which posits that cognition mediates relationships between social ideology and discourse through individuals' formation and enactment of "context models," or mental "representations of ... themselves, their ongoing actions and speech acts, their goals, plans, the setting (time, place, circumstances) or other relative properties of the context" (van Dijk, 1993, p. 111). Individuals reference ideologies, "a special form of social cognition shared by social groups" (van Dijk, 2001, p. 12), in the production of their own self-perceptions and beliefs, and these self-perceptions and attitudes influence how individuals communicate and produce discourse in a given context. In reverse, discourse that is locally produced by others may also influence individuals' perceptions of self and context. Not only does cognition mediate relationships between society and discourse through the construction of context models, but discourse also mediates relationships between society and individual cognition by virtue of other participants' discursive enactment of social ideology. Based in this framework, I suggest that classroom participants continually draw on social and institutional ideologies of reading,

as well as others' discursive enactments of such discourses, to construct perceptions of themselves and others as kinds of readers in particular contexts.

These suppositions are supported by other sociocognitive, sociocultural, and critical theoretical and empirical models. In the previous chapters, I have already described theories of self-efficacy that emphasize the influence of social feedback (like language and other social action) on self-efficacy development. These theories are strongly based on Bandura's (1986) social cognitive theory, which holds that behavioral, environmental, and cognitive variables are in constant, reciprocal interaction during teaching and learning. Furthermore, poststructuralist and critical discourse theorists have described the power of language and discourse to actively position subjects and create realities. Wetherell (2001), for example, argues:

The notion of discourse as social action questions ... assumptions [that language is simply representational, or that it represents people and the world as they exist independently of language]. A central point discourse researchers make is that **language is constructive**. It is **constitutive** of social life. Discourse builds objects, worlds, minds and social relations. It doesn't just reflect them. (p. 16)

Such theoretical models support the assumption that classroom discourses of reading, based in particular ideologies of reading practice, may actively position and construct adolescent students as particular kinds of successful or unsuccessful readers engaging in more or less valuable reading practices. The students may accept, challenge, or reinstantiate these positionings through their own actions and uses of language.

My understandings of ideology and discourse build on a range of feminist, poststructuralist, and critical discourse theorists, including Fairclough (2001), Davies

(2005), and Weedon (1997). I adopt Fairclough's (2001) definition of ideologies as "‘common-sense’ assumptions [about the world] which are implicit in the conventions according to which people interact linguistically, and of which people are generally not consciously aware" (p. 2). Ideologies, as described by Fairclough (2001), are

closely linked to power, because the nature of the ideological assumptions embedded in particular conventions, and so the nature of those conventions themselves, depends on the power relations which underlie the conventions; and because they are a means of legitimizing existing social relations and differences of power, simply through the recurrence of ordinary, familiar ways of behaving which take these relations and power differences for granted. (p. 2)

Individuals enact and perpetuate ideologies through discourses, or "institutionalized [uses] of language and language-like sign-systems" to "actively produce social and psychological realities" (Davies, 2005, p. 88). These conceptualizations of ideology and discourse closely parallel those advanced by van Dijk's (1998, 2009) model of discourse, society, and cognition.

In the current study, I examine ideologies of reading, or "common-sense" assumptions about what constitutes reading, reading practice, and successful reading. Classroom ideologies of reading include beliefs about the kinds of reading practices and texts that should be valued and legitimized in school contexts. Associated discourses of reading may include any uses of verbal or non-verbal language to communicate, create, enact, or enforce ideologies or values related to reading and reading practice.

Finally, this study relies on assumptions that literacy and reading are not straightforwardly defined, that any such definitions are contested, and that these

definitions necessarily shift across temporal and spatial contexts. These assumptions are based in sociocultural theories of literacy that define literate practice as fundamentally fluid and oriented toward locally determined and valued social practices. Street (1984), for example, has critiqued “autonomous” models of literacy, which focus on cognitive aspects of literacy while neglecting associated social practices and “the ideologies in which different literacies are embedded” (Street, 1984, p. 95). Luke and Baker (1991), Heap (1991), and McHoul (1991) have likewise argued that what “counts” as reading depends upon who defines it, who is allowed to define it (i.e., who has the power to do so), and the social purposes motivating those definitions. In schools, students’ and teachers’ language and actions; curricula and pedagogy; and various historical, cultural, and institutional pressures all contribute to definitions of what is valued as reading or literacy in classroom spaces (Baker, 1991; Bloome, Carter, Christian, Otto, & Shuart-Faris, 2005; Green & Meyer, 1991; Lewis, 2001; Luke, 1991). Understanding that definitions of reading and literacy are contested, I seek to understand (a) which definitions of reading have been adopted or negotiated in the research classroom, and (b) how and where these negotiations have occurred.

Together, these interdisciplinary theoretical perspectives provide a rich framework for investigating and analyzing classroom ideology and discourse related to reading; adolescent youths’ perceptions of, responses to, and participation in these classroom discourses; and the influence of classroom discourses on students’ identities and motivations. Given the range of complex cognitive, social, and political processes at play in literacy teaching and learning, I believe it is essential to adopt what Gutiérrez and colleagues (2011) call a syncretic approach to literacy theory and research: one that

includes “the principled and strategic use of transdisciplinary perspectives for the theoretical and methodological treatment of the social practices of literacy learning” (p. 415). My theoretical framework reflects such a commitment.

### **Critical Ethnography**

Ethnography, according to LeCompte and Schensul (1999), aims to “[generate] or [build] theories of cultures – or explanations of how people think, believe, and behave – that are situated in local time and space” (p. 8). Drawing primarily on data from participant observations, fieldnotes, interviews, and cultural artifacts, ethnographers seek to describe and understand how people act, interact, and collectively make, communicate, and negotiate meaning in a given cultural context. They conduct this work with particular concern for how cultural participants themselves perceive the world, how their perceptions develop within sociocultural and historical contexts, and how their perspectives on the world actively shape their lived realities (LeCompte & Schensul, 1999; Purcell-Gates, 2011).

Critical ethnography shares these characteristics, but also aims to identify and challenge social and cultural inequalities. As Madison (2005) puts it, critical ethnography “takes us beneath surface appearances, disrupts the *status quo*, and unsettles both neutrality and taken-for-granted assumptions by bringing to light underlying and obscure operations of power and control” (p. 5). Critical ethnographers also recognize that “ethnography can only summon, in James Clifford’s terms, ‘partial truths’ and ‘fictions’” (Britzman, 2003, p. 244). Any accounts of research participants or a research site must reflect the researcher’s own biases and experiences in the world. Critical ethnography,

therefore, calls for ongoing efforts to reflect on one's own positionality as a researcher in relation to participants (Madison, 2005), to privilege participants' ways of viewing and knowing the world (Smith, 2012), and to work closely with participants to reach an understanding of what happens in the field (Britzman, 2003; Madison, 2005). Critical ethnographic work cannot proceed without continual, reflective interaction and exchange with research participants. Without such exchange and concern for participants' perspectives and knowledge, the research is as empty as it is potentially exploitative (Smith, 2012).

As a critical ethnographic project, my study aims not only to describe how discourses of reading might influence youths' identities and self-efficacy as readers in a particular classroom cultural context, but also to call attention to how such discourses are tied to larger social and institutional ideologies of reading and literacy. By making these connections, we might then consider how institutional ideologies (e.g., in educational standards) of reading might produce more or less engaging curricula when teachers attempt to bring them into everyday practice.

### **Critical Discourse Analysis**

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) provides one set of theoretical and methodological tools for exploring relationships between everyday language (discourse) and social/institutional power. While there are many approaches for conducting critical discourse analytic studies, all "are generally concerned with a critical theory of the social world, the relationship of discourse in the construction and representation of this social

world, and a methodology that allows [the researcher] to describe, interpret, and explain such relationships” (Rogers, 2011, p. 3).

In this study, I draw on elements from three frameworks for CDA developed by Fairclough (2001), Gee (2011), and van Dijk (2009). As I described in Chapter Two, I have relied on van Dijk’s (1998, 2009) conceptualization of “the discourse-cognition-society triangle” to understand how localized discourse, as well as larger social ideologies, might contribute to individuals’ perceptions of self and context. This framework has provided a broad rationale for studying classroom discourses of reading as potential influences on students’ identities and self-efficacy as readers, two constructs that develop at the intersections of cognition and social interaction. Fairclough’s (2001) definition of ideologies as “‘common-sense’ assumptions [about the world] which are implicit in the conventions according to which people interact linguistically” (p. 2) has been helpful for framing and analyzing everyday classroom language (i.e., discourse) as instantiations of more widespread social beliefs.

In my discourse analyses, I have also generally followed Fairclough’s “three dimensions, or stages” of CDA: description, interpretation, and explanation. As Fairclough puts it, *description* “is generally thought of as a matter of identifying and ‘labelling’ formal features of a text [e.g., grammatical, expressive, or organizational features]” (p. 22). *Interpretation* is concerned with “the cognitive processes or participants” (p. 22), or how they use, produce, and interpret language based on background knowledge (or “members’ resources”) in social contexts (p. 118). And *explanation* examines “the relationship between interaction and social context ... the social determination of the processes of [textual] production and interpretation, and their



social effects” (p. 22). In other words, analysis at this last stage considers how local discourses are motivated by ideology and social power structures. By continually moving between these three dimensions of CDA, I have been able to explore how discourse in my research site reflected classroom participants’ individual beliefs about reading practices, as well as how these discourses were related to broader social and institutional beliefs about reading.

Finally, I have used Gee’s (2011) conceptualization of “big D” Discourse – “ways of combining and integrating language, actions, interactions, ways of thinking, believing, valuing, and using various symbols, tools, and objects to enact a particular sort of socially recognizable identity” (p. 29) – to consider how research participants used language and action to define reading and to enact reader identities. In analyzing particular texts and examples of discourse, I have also drawn on several of Gee’s “building tasks,” or sets of questions designed to uncover how individuals use language to “build ... seven areas of ‘reality’” (p. 17). I have most directly used Gee’s building tasks related to “Practices,” “Significance,” “Identities,” “Politics,” and “Sign Systems and Knowledge” (p. 17).

Sample questions for these areas of analysis include:

**Practices:** “What practice (activity) or practices (activities) is this piece of language being used to enact (i.e., get others to recognize as going on)?” (p. 18)

**Significance:** “How is this piece of language being used to make certain things significant or not and in what ways?” (p. 17)

**Identities:** “What identity or identities is this piece of language being used to enact (i.e., get others to recognize as operative)?” (p. 18)

**Politics:** “What perspective on social goods is this piece communicating (i.e., what is being communicated as to what is taken to be ‘normal,’ ‘right,’ ‘correct,’ ‘proper,’ ‘appropriate,’ ‘valuable,’ ‘the way things are,’ ‘the way things ought to be,’ ‘high status or low status,’ ‘like me or not like me,’ and so forth)? (p. 19)

**Sign Systems and Knowledge:** “How does this piece of language privilege or disprivilege specific sign systems ... or different ways of knowing and believing or claims to knowledge and belief?” (p. 20)

By asking these kinds of questions of curricular texts and other classroom language, I explored what it meant to read and to be a reader in my research site. I will describe how I adapted these questions for my own analytic purposes in Chapter Five.

### **Pragmatic, Mixed Methodological Design**

Finally, in designing this study, I was influenced by the work of several pragmatic and mixed methodologists (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011; Dillon, O’Brien, & Heilman, 2013; Gorard, 2010), all of whom argue for open-minded, purposeful selection of a research design and methods that are best suited to specific research questions. These scholars reject strict adherence to traditionally quantitative or qualitative research paradigms, suggesting instead that the most rigorous, productive, and ethical research collects and makes use of all relevant data. Gorard (2010) explains this position most simply:

For important matters, we behave sensibly, eclectically, critically, skeptically, but always with that final leap of faith because research, however carefully conducted, does not provide the action – it only informs action. We collect all and any evidence available to us as time and resources allow and then synthesize it naturally, without consideration of mixing methods as such ... Mixed methods, in the sense of having a variety of tools in the toolbox and using them as appropriate, is the only sensible way to approach research. (p. 247)

In this spirit, I sought to collect and analyze multiple types of quantitative and qualitative data to thoroughly investigate my research questions.

Within the critical ethnographic framework, this research employed an “embedded” mixed methods design, wherein quantitative data collection and analysis played “a supportive, secondary role” in the predominantly qualitative study (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011, p. 91). Participant observations, classroom artifacts, audio and video recordings of classroom activities, and semi-structured interviews were the primary data sources from which I drew inferences related to the research questions. In addition, quantitative surveys of students’ perceptions of classroom discourses, their identities as readers, and their reading self-efficacy provided a means of (a) targeting qualitative interview guides to individual participants and (b) generating a supplemental, more general understanding of students’ perceptions of classroom discourse and their self-perceptions as readers. Concurrent collection and analysis of multiple types of quantitative and qualitative data contributed to a fuller understanding of the research problem and questions (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011) and facilitated examinations of individual constructs (e.g., identity and self-efficacy) from multiple perspectives, adding to the validity of research findings (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2007; Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011).

### **Research Site and Participants**

The site for this research was South Suburban High School, a large, public, suburban high school located outside of a medium-sized Midwestern city. The school emphasized college preparation and served around 1700 students in grades nine through twelve. My

study focused on teaching and learning activities in one 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> grade English class. Research participants included students enrolled in the class, as well as the classroom teacher.

I based my selection of this research site on two central criteria: institutional diversity and classroom curriculum. Based on information available online (e.g., on school district websites) and recommendations from teaching and university colleagues, I first identified several local high school English teachers whose classroom curricula included significant attention to reading or interpreting texts. Among these teachers, I focused particularly on those individuals at institutions serving diverse student populations. My goal was to select a research site in which I might find variation not only in classroom reading practices, but also in students' reading practices outside of school. After identifying possible classroom sites, I extended email invitations to each potential teacher participant to gauge their interest in the study. Ultimately, one teacher (Ms. Bennett) expressed interest, agreed to participate, and taught at an institution where I was able to gain access at the classroom, building, and district levels. Prior to beginning fieldwork, I met with Ms. Bennett in her classroom to describe my research in detail and to gain her written consent for participation.

Following approval from both university and school district institutional review boards, I invited all students (a total of 30 youth) in the research classroom to participate in the study. At the start of one class period, I described the goals and procedures for the research, explained how individuals could choose to participate, answered student questions, and distributed participant assent and parental consent forms (see Appendix A). Students were able to consent to participation in all, some, or no parts of the study,

and completion of both assent and consent forms were required prior to students' inclusion in the research. As compensation, I offered \$10 gift cards (chosen from iTunes, Amazon.com, and Barnes & Noble) to students who participated in any part of the study. Students who participated in an interview received an additional \$10 gift card.

Ms. Bennett agreed to participate in all parts of the study. In addition, nine students assented (and received parental consent) to participate in the research. Seven of these students agreed to be included in all aspects of the study, while two chose to limit their participation (by declining to be described in field jottings or to be audio-video recorded). Five of these students also participated in semi-structured interviews. Throughout the study, participants were free to decline to answer any question or to discontinue or alter their participation at any time (though none chose to do so). Throughout this dissertation, I refer to participants only by pseudonyms. I have also modified some descriptions of the research site to protect confidentiality.

### **Data Collection**

My data sources included participant observations and associated fieldnotes, classroom artifacts, semi-structured interviews, student surveys, audio-video recordings of classroom activities, and student participants' academic records. I describe my procedures for collecting each of these types of data below.

#### **Participant Observations**

Extensive, ongoing participant observations in the research site are arguably the most essential data source in an ethnographic study. These observations – and fieldnotes based on the observations – provide important documentation of participants' everyday

activities, interactions, and ways of being in a cultural context. For this study, I conducted approximately thirty hours of classroom observations over three months. These observations included two to three classroom visits – each about an hour long – each week. On many days, I was more observer than participant, sitting in the back of the classroom to watch and record activities. On other days, I interacted with students, talking to them about their reading or helping with small-group and individual assignments. All these observations helped me understand how students behaved as readers, how they assigned value to different types of reading, how students’ language or behaviors suggested particular reader identities and motivations, and how curricula and pedagogy framed and defined reading practice.

As I conducted participant observations, I jotted scratch notes about classroom learning activities with texts, class discussions, and participants’ practices as readers. After each observation period, I audio-recorded my reflections on the day’s events, making initial empirical and theoretical observations. Within twenty-four hours of each observation, I composed fieldnotes based on guidelines suggested by Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw (2011). I organized these notes temporally, describing classroom events from start to finish, and in the form of narrative vignettes to capture detail and dialogue. I also made note of specific, reading-related events to later transcribe from audio-video recordings.

### **Audio-Video Recordings**

In addition to fieldnotes, audio-video recordings of everyday activities provided detailed accounts of participants’ talk and work around classroom texts. I collected audio recordings of most class sessions, as well as video recordings of selected activities (e.g.,

organized class discussions). When I identified classroom events of special interest based on fieldnotes or interviews, I turned to these recordings for precise records of participants' actions and language. I fully transcribed only these key events. Video recordings also captured physical and spatial features of the research site.

### **Classroom Artifacts**

Often, classroom artifacts like informational handouts and wall hangings explicitly refer to practices that teachers associate with “good readers” (e.g., particular reading strategies). Other classroom artifacts like student assignments indirectly assign value to different forms and ways of reading, depending on the types of tasks students must complete. With these points in mind, I collected physical or digital copies of all class texts, slide presentations, reading guides, assignments, and other assessments. I also collected photographs of wall hangings, handwritten texts on the classroom whiteboard, and some samples of student work (e.g., posters created in small groups). I turned to all of these artifacts to help me understand the types of texts and reading practices that were prevalent and valued in the research classroom.

### **Teacher Conversations and Interview**

Throughout my study, I engaged in frequent informal conversations with the classroom teacher about her students, teaching practices, and teaching philosophies. I recorded the content of these conversations in daily fieldnotes. In addition, about midway through the study, I conducted one audio-recorded, semi-structured interview with my teacher participant. This interview focused on exploring her classroom curriculum, her values for reading practices in the classroom, her goals for reading instruction, and her goals for

supporting students' growth as readers (see Appendix B for the full interview guide). Together with field observations, these conversations helped me understand the classroom teacher's goals for reading instruction, as well as the kinds of texts and reading practices that she perceived as valuable in the classroom context.

### **Student Interviews**

I conducted audio-recorded, semi-structured interviews with five student participants. During these interviews, I engaged youth in conversations about their reading practices both in and out of school. In particular, I was interested in questions like: How did students identify as readers? How confident did students feel as readers? What kinds of texts and reading practices did students believe were valued or not valued in their classroom? How did students' perceptions of classroom values related to reading affect how they felt as readers in and out of school? By talking directly with youth about their perceptions of classroom values, their reading practices, and their self-perceptions as readers, I aimed to learn how classroom discourses affected them personally as readers and learners. In addition, these one-on-one conversations allowed me to explore how youths' perspectives on reading were influenced by their sociocultural identities and experiences. While I followed a general interview guide with each student (see Appendix C), I adapted questions based on individual students' responses to surveys (see below) and my own observations of their behaviors in class.

### **Student Surveys**

I used several survey instruments to collect quantitative data related to students' perceptions of classroom reading practices, their identities as readers, and their reading



self-efficacy. To measure students' self-efficacy, I administered the Reader Self-Perception Scale 2 (Henk, Marinak, & Melnick, 2012/2013). This validated, 47-item instrument includes four subscales based on four factors known to predict efficacy beliefs, including performances, observational comparisons, social feedback, and physiological feedback. In addition, I measured students' identities as readers and their perceptions of classroom reading practices using a combination of original survey items, items borrowed directly from other survey instruments (Bozack, 2011; McCaslin, 2008), and items that I slightly adapted from other instruments. I administered all survey items, which asked students to respond to various statements about reading on a Likert-type scale, as a single instrument (see Appendix D). I surveyed all students in the research classroom at the start of the study; nine students consented to my analyses of their responses.

### **Academic Records**

Finally, I collected academic records for each student participant. Records included students' past standardized assessment scores, as well as information regarding how many academic credits they had earned toward high school graduation. These data provided guidance for understanding participants' attitudes toward reading in the context of their overall academic achievement. The amount of available achievement data varied by student, depending on how long each participant had been enrolled in the school district.

## **Data Analysis and Interpretation**

### **Descriptive Statistical Analysis**

My data analysis began with descriptive statistical analyses of student survey responses ( $n = 9$ ), which I conducted with R (an increasingly well-known, open source software package). I numerically coded each survey response, assigning a “1” for “strongly disagree,” a “2” for “disagree,” a “3” for “undecided,” and so on. This coding scheme allowed me to examine frequencies of responses for each survey item, to calculate mean responses for each item, and to calculate correlations between multiple items.

I calculated total scores for each student participant’s “reader identity” and “reading self-efficacy” by summing the numerical scores for survey items associated with each of these constructs (Appendix D indicates which items were associated with each construct). Using guidelines provided by the authors of the Reader Self-Perception Scale 2 (described above), I also calculated participants’ self-efficacy subscores related to the four major predictors of self-efficacy beliefs. I was then able to calculate correlations between these total scores, subscores, and scores on individual survey items.

Using these techniques, I explored quantitative relationships between students’ reader identities, reading self-efficacy, and perceptions of school reading to come to a general understanding of their overall attitudes as readers. I also used preliminary descriptive analyses of individual students’ survey responses to prepare for qualitative interviews. For example, if a participant was “undecided” about a particular component of reader identity, I was more likely to ask questions to probe her thinking on that topic. Interviews also helped me to explore some reasons for participants’ attitudes as demonstrated in their surveys.

### **Constant Comparative Analysis**

I analyzed fieldnotes, interview transcripts, and classroom artifacts using constant comparative analytic methods (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 2011; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). As I generated fieldnotes and transcripts, I coded and compared new observations to previous ones, reanalyzing earlier observations in light of new findings. As I formed preliminary impressions through this ongoing analysis, I wrote weekly theoretical memos to synthesize observations, drew connections between my findings and research questions, and revised research questions as necessary. This recursive process allowed me to develop more refined understandings of the classroom cultural context as I spent more time in the field. In line with my research questions, I coded these data for instances in which participants' language or activities revealed how they defined or conceptualized reading, how they perceived themselves as readers (in the cases of students), and how they referenced different discourses to define reading and reader identity.

My analyses began with open coding, during which I coded each line of data according to what participants were doing or accomplishing with respect to reading in the classroom. Based on the results of open coding and theoretical memoing, I identified important or recurrent themes in the data – particularly themes that related to the research questions. I then continued to analyze fieldnote data, interview transcripts, and classroom artifacts through focused coding, during which I recoded using only codes related to the major themes. This focused coding involved not only applying, but also refining and subdividing, major codes, resulting in a set of codes and subcodes that captured dominant patterns as well exceptions in the data. Across data sources, my constant comparative

analyses ultimately generated five major themes – or ways of being a reader – in the research context, which I will describe in Chapter Five.

### **Critical Discourse Analysis**

In order to better understand how participants drew on broader social ideologies to define and value reading in the classroom context, I used critical discourse analysis (described above) to analyze curricular artifacts and interview transcripts. Using procedures outlined by Fairclough (2001) and Gee (2011), I analyzed all classroom handouts and assignments for “big D” Discourses and ideologies related to reading and reading practices. Based on these analyses, I grouped artifacts according to shared Discourses and ideologies; exemplars from these groups deepened my understanding of the ways of reading and being a reader that I identified through constant comparative analyses by connecting classroom Discourse to broader social contexts.

From interview transcripts and fieldnotes, I selected key excerpts that illustrated the five major themes related to being and becoming a reader in the research context. I analyzed these excerpts using the same CDA methods describe above. These analyses helped me to understand how participants enacted various ideologies and discourses of reading through their activities and talk around classroom texts. Close discourse analyses of student interview transcripts also helped me to understand how participants construed connections between these particular definitions and values for reading and their identities and self-efficacy as readers.

### **Credibility and Trustworthiness**

By exploring participants' practices and perspectives on reading from multiple angles, I aimed to generate credible and trustworthy findings. During my study, I used analyses of multiple data sources to reach, question, and revise my conclusions. Using triangulation, I used different sources of information (e.g., surveys and interviews) to continually check my results. If two or more data sources appeared contradictory, I revisited my analyses to try to understand what interpretations of the data would account for these multiple perspectives. I aimed always to view and analyze data sources in concert, rather than separately, in order to make strong inferences from rich, complex data. Through this recursive and integrated process, I am confident that I have arrived at stories of readers and reading that accurately capture the culture of the research context.

### **Chapter Summary**

This chapter has provided a methodological overview of my study of relationships between discourses of reading and students' self-perceptions as readers in a high school English classroom. As a mixed methods, critical ethnographic project, this research aimed to describe, using multiple quantitative and qualitative data sources, how everyday language and classroom activities affected student participants' reader identities and self-efficacy. I also sought to question the educational ideologies that motivated classroom discourses of reading. To accomplish these goals, I used a combination of descriptive statistical analysis, constant comparative analysis, and critical discourse analysis. In the following chapters, I will present narrative summaries of my findings.

## **PART II**

### **Findings**

In Part I of this dissertation, I described the context, rationale, and methodology for a mixed methods, critical ethnographic study of discourse, reader identity, and reading self-efficacy in a high school English classroom. Drawing on a variety of qualitative and quantitative data sources, I sought to understand not only how classroom participants perceived and (re)enacted different discourses related to reading and literacy, but also how exposure to and participation in these discourses informed students' self-perceptions as readers. The specific research questions that guided the study are restated below:

1. How do students perceive themselves as readers?
2. How are classroom reading practices and goals discursively defined by curriculum and pedagogy?
3. How do discursive definitions of reading influence individual students' reader identities and self-efficacy?

In Part II, I present my findings in relation to these questions. Through selected illustrations of discourse analyses, descriptive statistical analyses, and constant comparative analyses of curricular artifacts, student surveys, and participant interviews, I aim to demonstrate how students' reader identities and self-efficacy took shape in the context of classroom discourse and social ideologies of literacy. I supplement these analyses with my own observations and experiences in the research classroom.

In Chapter Four, I begin with a description of South Suburban High School, where I spent approximately thirty hours (over three months) observing activities in Ms.

Bennett's 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> grade American Literature and Composition class. I also describe Ms. Bennett, her classroom, and the curriculum that guided her class's learning. In Chapter Five, I consider how classroom texts, pedagogies, and participants discursively acted to define reading and literacy in the classroom space, as well as how students' reader identities and self-efficacy beliefs developed, in part, in relation to classroom discourses of reading and literacy. Throughout these sections, I engage in what Luke (2002) has described as "a principled and transparent shunting back and forth between the microanalysis of texts ... and the macroanalysis of social formations, institutions, and power relations that these texts index and construct" (p. 100). The result is, I hope, a rich account of one classroom, its characteristic texts and reading practices, and the influences of discourses and broad social beliefs about reading on the self-perceptions of individual learners.

In Chapter Six, drawing on van Dijk's (1998, 2009) theorization of "the discourse-cognition-society triangle," I summarize the results of my research and consider what the results of the study suggest about the development of reader identity and self-efficacy at the intersection of discourse and social ideologies of reading. I also examine the implications of this work for middle and high school curriculum development and classroom instruction.

## **CHAPTER FOUR**

### **Context and Curriculum**

#### **South Suburban High School**

Located approximately twenty miles outside a major Midwestern city, South Suburban High School (SSHS) prides itself on excellence in academics, sports, the arts, and student leadership. The school curriculum comprises over three hundred required and elective courses, including twelve Advanced Placement courses in English, mathematics, languages, the arts, and the social and natural sciences. Over twenty extracurricular activities provide opportunities for students to think and perform in a variety of competitive and creative venues. In 2013, South Suburban students exceeded statewide average scores on all standardized assessments in reading, mathematics, and science. In the same year, SSHS reported a 92% high school graduation rate.

In 2013-2014, South Suburban High School served approximately 1700 youth in grades nine through twelve. A majority (65%) of students were White, with smaller Black (18%), Hispanic (10%), Asian/Pacific Islander (7%), and Native American (1%) student populations. In contrast, in 2012-2013, nearly all (95%) SSHS teachers were White, with few Black (3%), Asian (1%), and Hispanic (1%) faculty members. In 2013-2014, approximately 4% of students were classified as English learners, and 15% received special education services. Approximately 34% of students received free or reduced lunches.

A remnant of open plan schools of the late twentieth century, South Suburban High School features wide hallways wrapped around a large, open space near the center of the



building — a space now occupied by a well-stocked library and media center, several Apple computer labs, and clusters of old, metal teachers’ desks. At the time of my study, classrooms on two floors were furnished with small, plastic, faux wooden desks arranged in clusters or rows. Many of these rooms opened onto hallways through rows of large windows, allowing constant visual access to the teachers and learners inside. An indoor theater provided space for school assemblies and student productions, and multiple gymnasiums house physical education classes and several of South Suburban’s twenty-plus athletic teams. In a large lobby connecting each of these sections of the main campus building, a hanging placard set a collegial, school-spirited tone for the community:

### **CLASS ACT**

In all situations, **TIGERS** follow the tenets of being a **CLASS ACT**.

We treat each other and our school with dignity and respect.

We listen to one another and validate each other’s feelings.

We are aware of the power of our words, actions, and our attitude.

We are **TIGERS**, and we pride ourselves on always striving to be a **CLASS ACT**.

During one of my first visits to South Suburban High, Dr. Collins, a veteran English language arts teacher and reading specialist, directed me toward an American flag that stood in a corner a short distance from the building’s front doors. The flag’s polished brass stand was tall — about six feet in height, I guessed — and the flag itself was bright, clean, and pressed. Dr. Collins described this fixture of American public schools as South Suburban’s “nexus.” *If you really want a sense of this place*, he suggested, *go stand by that flag at the second period bell*. Curious, I followed his advice.

The bell rang, and I observed as hundreds of youth – many wearing dangling headphones, all shouldering bulging backpacks, and a few even carrying oversized

pillows – emerged from all directions, flowing past and into surrounding classrooms. I was grateful for my place outside the current, as I watched and listened for insights into the collective character of SSHS, its students, and its culture. I found nothing surprising; perhaps as in most high schools, the conversations I overheard centered on sports, music, homework, after-school plans, and an upcoming school dance. I observed youth of all races, sizes, personalities, and styles. Some students walked alone, while others traveled in tightly packed groups. Some, laughing loudly, chased others through the crowds – much to the annoyance of nearby teachers, who called for more care. Many students, who, I reflected, seemed proud to be South Suburban Tigers, wore t-shirts and jerseys representing extra-curricular activities or school sports teams. The building bustled with energy and movement.

On that day (and over many others afterward) I learned that South Suburban High School, like so many other schools across the United States, was filled with voices — of teachers, of students, of parents, and of the various educational leaders and policymakers who have determined what youth can and should learn. I saw this most in Room 200, where Ms. Bennett and her group of thirty juniors and seniors met each day to explore “the American Dream” through reading, writing, and discussion.

### **Ms. Bennett**

I first met Ms. Bennett on a Wednesday afternoon, around one week before I would begin observations in her classroom. A petite woman with cropped blonde hair, light freckles, and a frequent smile, she welcomed me – during her lunch period, no less – to discuss my research, her American Literature and Composition class, and possible participation in

my study. After our twenty-minute conversation, I reflected not only on how much she had learned about her students in two short weeks, but also on her interests in learning still more about students' self-perceptions and motivations in her classroom. Throughout my trimester with Ms. Bennett, I was struck by her articulateness in discussing her teaching, her students' learning, and the goals of her classroom curriculum.

At the time of my study, Ms. Bennett had been a high school English teacher for approximately thirteen years. Although she described a circuitous path toward a teaching career – moving from undergraduate concentrations in pre-veterinary studies, through various natural sciences, and ultimately to education – she believed she belonged in an English classroom. “I have always loved English,” she explained in one of our interviews, “and I’ve always been a big reader.” Over the course of her career, Ms. Bennett had taught general and advanced high school-level courses in the areas of literature, composition, mass media, creative writing, research writing, and reading. In her early years as a teacher, she had also completed coursework toward professional licensure in reading education.

Above all, Ms. Bennett strived to create opportunities for youth to be successful in her classroom. Describing her teaching philosophy, she explained:

I believe all kids can learn. I believe that kids really like to feel successful, and that they're going to be more successful when they feel as though they have small successes along the way. And I think students shut down when they don't feel successful. And so I guess my philosophy would be, it is my job to try to help them feel successful so that they continue making progress.  
(November 15, Interview)

She aimed to accomplish this, in part, by differentiating instructional approaches and course assignments for individuals and groups of students. For example, in the class that I

observed, Ms. Bennett allowed students to select different essay writing prompts, depending on their abilities and levels of comfort with content topics. In another class, she used grading contracts that outlined specific, tiered criteria for earning different letter grades. Since the start of her career, Ms. Bennett has shifted from “being content-oriented” – or concentrating on the specific texts that students read and understand – toward a stance that values students’ development of specific literacy skills.

In the area of reading, Ms. Bennett focused on helping her students learn to read deeply and critically. When asked which kinds of skills she hoped her students would develop in her classroom, she noted four in particular (my emphasis below):

I hope that they can **pick out a main idea** in a text, that when they’re reading through something they realize that all of the details aren’t important, but that there is a main idea here. That they can see – that they can **pick out what the argument is within a text**, and they can **see that people are using evidence in a particular way in order to create that argument**. I want them to be able to explain what the text says explicitly, but also that they are able to **make inferences** from that, as well. I think that’s an important skill no matter what you’re reading. (November 15, Interview)

In her description of these essential reading skills, Ms. Bennett placed value on students’ abilities to read both explicit and implicit elements of texts. It was not enough for youth to comprehend individual statements or details. Rather, Ms. Bennett aimed to lead students toward readings and interpretations of texts that identified what was unsaid as well as said (students “are able to make inferences”), and that considered how authors used evidence to achieve rhetorical or political goals (students “can see that people are using evidence in a particular way in order to create that argument”). This orientation toward reading between and beyond the words printed on a page was present not only in Ms. Bennett’s philosophical discussions of teaching, but also in her teaching practice.

## **Room 200**

Ms. Bennett's classroom, Room 200, was located a short distance from the school's main entrance – down one corridor, past several other English classrooms, and around an open corner where students tended to congregate before and after classes. Room 200 was, in fact, surrounded by laboratories and science classrooms – a result of the English department's desire to claim space in a newer section of the building. This room was more enclosed than others I had observed, opening into the hallway through only a solid gray door alongside a tall, narrow window. Still, the interior of Room 200 was bright. Two banks of windows along the back of the classroom admitted much of the afternoon sunlight, and the room's pale yellow walls added to a general sense of openness – perhaps in spite of the closely packed rows of plastic student desks.

A large whiteboard, along with a sliding electronic smart board, dominated the front wall of the classroom. Ms. Bennett's metal, wood-topped desk, which was often covered in student assignments and paperwork, occupied the corner to the left of these. To the right, a bulletin board featured five years of previous students' senior photographs and graduation announcements. On the left and right sides of the room, two additional whiteboards displayed a monthly school calendar, as well as weekly agendas for each of Ms. Bennett's classes. A small, eight-shelf bookcase near the room's entrance held volumes of classic and modern poetry, novels from various periods and genres, literary biographies, books of literary theory, and several rows of reference materials.

The classroom's remaining wall space was filled with inspirational and literary posters: famous quotations, definitions and illustrations of literary devices, and mock

movie advertisements for canonical novels like *The Scarlet Letter*, *The Great Gatsby*, and *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*. Colorful and visually engaging, these posters combined elements of print and visual texts. Samples of student artwork – drawings and paintings – were also present in several locations in the classroom. The room felt warm, welcoming, and open for expression and learning.

Thirty students were enrolled in Ms. Bennett’s American Literature and Composition class during the fall of 2013. Students’ self-reported demographic data, collected from twenty-nine of thirty youth, are summarized in Table 4.1 below.

**Table 4.1: Student Demographic Data (N = 29)**

	<u>Sample Distribution (n)</u>
<b>Grade</b>	
11	86% (25)
12	14% (4)
<b>Age</b>	
16	69% (20)
17	31% (9)
<b>Sex</b>	
Male	72% (21)
Female	28% (8)
<b>Race/Ethnicity</b>	
White	62% (18)
Black, African American, Caribbean	17% (5)
Multiracial <sup>a</sup>	10% (3)
American	3% (1)
Asian	3% (1)
Native American	3% (1)

<sup>a</sup> Includes students who self-identified as Black/Puerto Rican, White/Asian, and White/Latino.

Racial demographics in Ms. Bennett's class were very similar to overall demographics at South Suburban High School, particularly if students who identified as multiracial were also included in broader categories (e.g., Asian, Hispanic, etc.). The distribution between male and female students, however, was noticeably skewed toward males. It was unclear how this might have affected classroom interactions, but Ms. Bennett noted that male students tended to be less interested in reading and language arts. My own experience as a researcher in Room 200 seemed to support this observation, as the students who volunteered to participate in my study were disproportionately female – especially with respect to rates of participation in interviews. While this dissertation does not explicitly examine the role of gender in shaping students' self-perceptions or discursive actions as readers, this would be a potential area for exploration in future research.

### **Exploring “the American Dream” through American Literature and Composition: Curriculum from Conception to Practice**

As of the year of my study, all students at South Suburban High School were required to enroll in American Literature and Composition during their junior or senior year. As described in the school's course registration guide, American Literature and Composition aimed to:

provide students with integrated instruction in both literature and writing. The study of literature will include the reading of a variety of American literary texts and the analysis of seminal American documents. Composition studies will focus on research, rhetoric, and argumentation.

In 2013, Ms. Bennett and one of her colleagues were, in fact, the first to teach this course at SSHS, and they took a lead in developing the new curriculum in consultation with others in their English department. They created the curriculum, in part, to meet state

educational standards, which included the Common Core Standards for English Language Arts in addition to other specific curricular directives. The standards required the inclusion of “foundational U.S. documents of historical and literary significance,” including the Declaration of Independence and the Preamble to the United States Constitution. However, Ms. Bennett and her colleagues were free to experiment with other texts and course assignments.

With some encouragement from their school district, SSHS English teachers chose to develop an American Literature and Composition curriculum driven by inquiry-based reading and learning. “After a lot of debating,” Ms. Bennett explained, she and her colleagues decided to ask students, “Is the American Dream equally accessible by all people?” In relation to this question, students participated in reading and discussions about poverty, racism, community heritage, and social acceptance – all designed to explore smaller questions about the roles of luck, context, hard work, and social access in shaping individuals’ opportunities for personal and economic success. Through this inquiry-driven approach to instruction and learning, SSHS teachers hoped to engage students with interesting, current texts that would help them answer a question relevant to their lives:

We knew we didn’t want to do *The Great Gatsby* ... We had decided as a department that we wanted to do some contemporary stuff. Because this was a class that all kids were going to have to take if they didn’t take AP, we did not want to reach way back and keep pulling out the same stuff that we’ve always been doing. (Ms. Bennett, November 15, Interview)

Indeed, Ms. Bennett and her primary colleague in teaching this course selected a range of historical and contemporary materials for classroom use, including documents, poems, a recent play, a modern novel, and numerous articles. They identified central texts (e.g., the



play and novel) well in advance, while choosing supplemental texts as the trimester progressed:

A lot of the other stuff that we've just been doing on the side – like the Michele Norris piece or all of these little things that we've done – have been stuff that literally have been pulled like three days before we present it in class because we just have been keeping that question in mind, keeping the idea in mind, and then I am just always scouring for stuff to use. (Ms. Bennett, November 15, Interview)

Ms. Bennett's students processed, responded to, and demonstrated their understanding of classroom texts through a variety of individual and collaborative assignments, including reading journals (in which students responded to assigned prompts), essays, guided small-group and whole-group discussions, creative projects (e.g., character analysis posters), and, in one case, a multiple-choice exam. These assignments encouraged students not only to summarize and interpret individual texts, but also to make connections between texts to answer the class's guiding inquiry question. For Ms.

Bennett, the key goals of the new American Literature and Composition curriculum were:

for students ... to be able to answer that question and to see how multiple sources can help us come to answer to that question. And that's one of the other elements of the Common Core, that you can see a common theme in multiple sources. I mean, really, as far as the curriculum, I wanted kids to be reading things that they found to be interesting and that they genuinely enjoyed reading – which was exciting about this, to be able to finally pull out some pieces that were going to be really contemporary and hopefully kids were really going to like. And then second of all, to use those sources as a way of answering a big philosophical question and to allow kids to help develop their own answer to that question based on things that they have read. (November 15, Interview)

Based on my observations in Room 200 and my discussions with classroom participants, it was apparent that the success of Ms. Bennett's inquiry-based curriculum – measured by students' interest, engagement, and learning – depended in large part on the texts that she

and her colleagues selected, as well as on how students used those texts during learning activities. Did students use multiple texts to answer the guiding inquiry question? In the next section, I provide an overview of the kinds of texts that comprised the classroom curriculum and how these texts came together in the classroom space.

### **Inclusion and Circulation of Texts**

It is mid-October, and Ms. Bennett's class has gathered to participate in "a full class, student-directed discussion over poverty" in the United States. Over the past several weeks, students have read, viewed, performed, and analyzed a variety of texts that will inform their perspectives and arguments on this topic. Ms. Bennett has asked me to track today's conversation – including students' questions, ideas, responses, and sources of evidence – on the whiteboard at the front of the classroom; meanwhile, she will focus on logging students' participation and navigating periods of uncertainty or silence. As nearly thirty youth attempt to maneuver their desks into an amorphous circle, I prepare by penning, in bold black marker, a guiding discussion question in the center of the empty writing space: **What can or should be done about poverty in America?**

The discussion begins slowly. Ms. Bennett announces that Michael, a junior with shaggy blonde hair and a usually quiet demeanor, has "bravely volunteered to start us off." He reads from one of several small notecards, which he and his classmates have been asked to pre-fill with questions and information to direct the conversation. "Who should help the poor?" Michael asks before citing statistics related to wealth distribution in the United States. "In 2001," he notes, "the top five percent of Americans owned 71.5% of the nation's wealth. So I think the top five percent of Americans should help the

poor.” Colin, another junior, agrees and references the same sheet of infographics from which Michael has sourced his data. “In 2000,” Colin says, “CEOs made 1039 times the amount that normal people made. I don’t know about you, but I think that’s a little ridiculous.” Several students nod in agreement.

Over the next thirty minutes, Ms. Bennett’s students discuss and debate causes of systemic poverty, the groups who suffer most from poverty and unemployment, the groups who most need assistance, and how individuals and communities can contribute to poverty relief efforts. Their conversation is cumulative and intertextual; they build on one another’s comments and draw evidence from various infographics, a printed article from *The Economist*, a television documentary about living on a minimum wage (*30 Days*), a dramatic play (*Good People*), and personal anecdotes. Prompted only occasionally by Ms. Bennett’s return to the central discussion question, students draw connections and highlight differences between arguments and texts.

When Aaron, an outspoken member of the class, suggests that assistance for women should be a priority, he references both statistics on women in poverty and the experiences of a female protagonist in *Good People*. Anna, a junior with long brown hair and another strong history of participation, complicates his argument with support from a third source; she explains, “I agree with Aaron, but I also disagree. I think women *should* be helped first, but families ... families are kind of like the thing we strive for, and Mrs. Dunham in the article has three children and a husband who is unable to work. They’re trying to keep their family together, and that’s really hard.” Michael agrees, adding observations from *30 Days*. A fourth student disagrees with Anna and Michael, instead advocating first for support for single parents, whom she sees portrayed in *Good People*.

At the close of this class discussion, the group has not reached clear conclusions about addressing poverty in the United States, but students have identified many causes and potential solutions. The once-empty whiteboard, in front of which I have been crossing during the class period, is filled with traces of a collaborative and recursive conversation. Straight and curving arrows link students' questions, answers, and textual references in all directions. Weeks of reading and thinking across texts are on display.

\* \* \* \* \*

While the vignette above describes just one day in Room 200, it is indicative not only of the kinds of texts that students encountered throughout the trimester, but also of how they used these texts. Ms. Bennett's classroom was fundamentally intertextual and multimodal. I have already described physical aspects of the learning space, which featured a variety of print and visual texts posted on the classroom walls and on bookshelves. The classroom curriculum also depended on the integration of a range of printed, visual, and aural materials. Table 4.2 presents an overview of the varieties of texts that students encountered.

Of the twenty-nine primary and supplemental texts that students read through the trimester, about two thirds included content in different forms. Some of these texts were primarily print-based with supplemental images (e.g., articles with embedded photographs), while others were predominantly multimodal (e.g., audio interviews, recorded speeches, and informational graphs). Students sometimes worked with the same text in multiple forms – for example, when they viewed an audiovisual recording of Martin Luther King, Jr.'s "I Have a Dream" speech while simultaneously following a printed transcript of the address. In another case, students listened to musical artist Tracy

Chapman's "Fast Car" while following a printed copy of the song's lyrics, which also included annotations directing students to draw comparisons between the song's speaker and the female protagonist in *Good People*. Students read and experienced "Fast Car" in multiple forms, and they worked to deepen their understanding of two separate texts by making intertextual connections. These were practices that I observed – and that Ms. Bennett encouraged – throughout my time in Room 200.

For Ms. Bennett, including both print and multimodal texts was important not only because she sought to help students answer difficult questions based on evidence from multiple sources (as described earlier), but also because she understood textual multimodality as a means of reaching students with different learning styles, interests, and skills. Discussing her motivation for introducing multimodal texts, she explained:

I think part of that ... is an element of differentiation ... because I know not all kids are readers, and that they're not going to get the same thing out of reading a *Time* magazine article that I might. So then I think it's important to expose them to other ways of getting that information. So whether we listen to something on the radio or whether we watch something on TV, I think it's just trying to make sure that every kid, that there's something that kind of appeals to them, or that I'm kind of playing to the strengths of everybody in the class as opposed to just what I would prefer, which would be to just sit down and read something. I guess part of it is an engagement piece, to see if I can get them [interested]. Some of it is stuff that I think is just important that's happening in the country that I don't know that they're going to get anywhere else ... I want them to kind of see what's out there. (November 15, Interview)

From many students' points of view, Ms. Bennett's multimodal curriculum was successful in supporting their learning, interest, and motivation to read. In my interviews with students, they remarked on the importance of having access to multiple kinds of texts for their understanding of class topics. In Chapter Five, I will discuss in more detail how multimodal texts contributed to students' self-perceptions as readers.

Table 4.2: Classroom Texts by Modality and Genre

Modality	Genre							Total by Modality
	Novels, Poems, & Plays	Documents & Artifacts	Charts & Cartoons	Articles	Television & Film	Music & Lyrics	Interviews & Speeches	
Print	2	2	1	2	-	-	-	7
Audio	-	-	-	-	-	-	2	2
Visual	-	1	-	-	-	-	-	1
Print-Audio	-	1	-	-	-	1	-	2
Print-Visual	2	1	6	2	-	-	-	11
Print-Audio-Visual	1	1	-	-	-	-	1	3
Audio-Visual	-	-	-	-	2	-	1	3
Total by Genre	5	6	7	4	2	1	4	29

## CHAPTER FIVE

### **Reader Identity, Self-Efficacy, and Discourses of Reading**

During one of my first conversations with Ms. Bennett, she warned me that I might find few explicit conversations about reading in her classroom. Her American Literature and Composition curriculum, while certainly concerned with students' abilities to read and comprehend a range of literary and informational texts, would not focus on teaching and developing students' reading skills and strategies. These lessons would occur only occasionally, or as individual students required assistance with specific texts. While willing to participate in my research, Ms. Bennett wondered whether her classroom would be the most suitable place to study relationships between discourse and students' self-perceptions as readers. I was undeterred, however, confident that any curriculum focused on reading and interpreting texts would necessarily produce and participate in discourses related to defining and valuing reading practice. That these discourses might be largely implicit – and therefore less subject to questioning or critique – seemed to be all the more reason to undertake my study in this context.

Three months of observations in Room 200 supported both my and Ms. Bennett's expectations. I witnessed few direct conversations about "good" reading practice, and most of these occurred between Ms. Bennett and individual students (as opposed to in whole-group lessons). Still, the classroom was rich with enactments of reading, as well as with different perspectives on what kinds of reading were important in school contexts. My goal in this chapter is to describe these practices and perspectives, ultimately building toward answers to the three research questions that guided my study:

1. How did Ms. Bennett's students perceive themselves as readers?
2. How were classroom reading practices and goals discursively defined by curriculum and pedagogy?
3. How did these discursive definitions of reading influence individual students' reader identities and self-efficacy?

To address these questions, I drew on findings from classroom observations, analyses of classroom artifacts, student surveys, interviews with classroom participants, and student achievement records. My methods of representation are also varied, moving between descriptive statistics, general qualitative description and interpretation, close analyses of discourse, and narrative vignettes. With these multiple data sources and methods of analysis, I aim to present a full picture of what it meant to read and to be a reader in Room 200 – particularly focusing on how Ms. Bennett and her students participated in discourses of reading (i.e., how they defined and valued different ways of reading) through their talk and work around classroom texts.

### **Trends in Reader Identity, Self-Efficacy, and Perceptions of School Reading**

Before exploring specific discourses of reading in Ms. Bennett's classroom, I begin with an examination of how her students perceived themselves and school-based reading in general. Overall, how did they identify as readers? How confident did they feel in different reading contexts? Did they view reading in school as a flexible activity, including different ways of approaching or interpreting texts? Did they find school-based texts interesting and meaningful? Answers to these questions provide a useful backdrop for understanding (a) how discourses of reading in Ms. Bennett's classroom might have



aligned with students' overall perceptions of reading in school settings, and (b) how students' self-perceptions as readers might have related to their general understandings of the variability, interestingness, and importance of school-based reading practices. To explore these questions initially, I surveyed students about their reader identities, their self-efficacy related to reading tasks, and their perceptions of school-based reading and reading materials. Nine youth (4 female, 5 male) consented to analysis of their responses.

### **Student Reader Identity**

My survey included eight items designed to measure the extent to which students considered themselves readers – or believed others would consider them readers – in different contexts. These items, as well as the distribution of student responses, are presented in Table 5.1. While it is not possible, based on nine students' responses, to make inferences about the full distribution and character of student reader identities in Ms. Bennett's classroom, one can nevertheless consider these data as indicators of the *range* of identities in Room 200. In this small sample, students demonstrated both positive and negative reader identities in each of the specified contexts at home and in school. Furthermore, students with differently oriented reader identities reported multiple degrees of positivity or negativity (e.g., by agreeing or strongly agreeing) on most survey items. And perhaps most tellingly, student responses on the final item, "Being a reader is an important part of who I am," were evenly split across the five possible response categories.

**Table 5.1: Student Reader Identity (n = 9)**

<b>Survey Item</b>	<b>Strongly Agree (%)</b>	<b>Agree (%)</b>	<b>Undecided (%)</b>	<b>Disagree (%)</b>	<b>Strongly Disagree (%)</b>	<b>M<sup>a</sup></b>
(1) I enjoy reading in school.	11.1	44.4	22.2	11.1	11.1	3.33
(2) I enjoy reading at home.	22.2	33.3	22.2	11.1	11.1	3.44
(3) I see myself as a reader in school.	11.1	44.4	22.2	11.1	11.1	3.33
(4) I see myself as a reader at home.	22.2	11.1	33.3	22.2	11.1	3.11
(5) My teachers see me as a reader.	11.1	33.3	44.4	-	11.1	3.33
(6) My family sees me as a reader.	11.1	33.3	44.4	-	11.1	3.33
(7) My friends see me as a reader.	22.2	-	55.5	11.1	11.1	3.11
(8) Being a reader is an important part of who I am.	22.2	22.2	22.2	11.1	22.2	3.11

<sup>a</sup> Survey scale: strongly agree = 5, agree = 4, undecided = 3, disagree = 2, strongly disagree = 1

All these observations indicate that Ms. Bennett's class included youth with a wide range of reader identities.<sup>2</sup> This finding supports one of Ms. Bennett's predictions during an early conversation about my study: that some of her students would clearly identify as readers, while others would be less enthusiastic.

There are also general trends in the distributions of these nine students' responses – trends to be further investigated later using qualitative data. For example, about half of the student participants reported that they enjoyed reading at school or at home (either agreeing or strongly agreeing with these survey items). The same percentage of students saw themselves as readers in school, while fewer considered themselves readers at home (with two or three students unsure about each of these items). Noticeably more of the students in this sample were unsure whether their teachers, family, and friends saw them as readers. This makes sense, considering that others' perceptions are often less accessible – or at least less clear – than one's own.

Correlational analyses indicate that there were varying levels of relationship between different aspects of students' identities as readers (although correlations between all eight survey items could be considered moderate to large; all correlations are presented in Table 5.2).<sup>3</sup> For example, I found a very large correlation between students' enjoyment of reading and their self-identification as readers at home ( $r = 0.93$ ).

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<sup>2</sup> On a methodological note, this range of responses also suggests that students with various reader identities – not only those with a particular type – consented to participation in the study. Given the small survey sample, this was a possible concern.

<sup>3</sup> Given the very small sample size for these analyses, here I do not make claims about statistically significant or causal relationships (and therefore do not include p-values or other test statistics). These findings serve only to describe trends in nine students' reader identities, providing context for understanding their orientation toward classroom reading practices.

**Table 5.2: Correlations between Reader Identity Survey Items (n = 9)**

<b>Survey Items</b>	Enjoy Reading (School)	Enjoy Reading (Home)	Self as Reader (School)	Self as Reader (Home)	Teachers See Reader	Family Sees Reader	Friends See Reader	Reading Is Important Part of Self
Enjoy Reading (School)	-	0.59	0.75	0.50	0.73	0.91	0.70	0.71
Enjoy Reading (Home)	0.59	-	0.74	0.93	0.89	0.56	0.85	0.52
Self as Reader (School)	0.75	0.74	-	0.80	0.82	0.73	0.78	0.77
Self as Reader (Home)	0.50	0.93	0.80	-	0.79	0.55	0.86	0.53
Teachers See Reader	0.73	0.89	0.82	0.79	-	0.70	0.85	0.70
Family Sees Reader	0.91	0.56	0.73	0.55	0.70	-	0.68	0.63
Friends See Reader	0.70	0.85	0.78	0.86	0.85	0.68	-	0.76
Reading Is Important Part of Self	0.71	0.52	0.77	0.53	0.70	0.63	0.76	-

The correlation between students' enjoyment of reading and their self-identification as readers at school was slightly lower, but nonetheless sizeable ( $r = 0.75$ ). These findings suggest that as students' enjoyment of reading increased, the degree to which they self-identified as readers also increased in both contexts (or vice versa). This is unsurprising, given the results of past studies of identity and reading practice.

Students' enjoyment of reading at home and their self-identification as readers in school were also strongly correlated ( $r = 0.74$ ). On the other hand, there was a more moderate relationship between youths' enjoyment of reading at school and their self-identification as readers at home ( $r = 0.50$ ). One explanation for this difference could be that, because reading at home is often a voluntary, self-motivated practice (i.e., students are not required to do it), we might indeed expect that students who enjoy home-based reading are more likely to identify as readers generally. By contrast, because reading at school is compulsory, we might expect less relationship between attitudes toward school-based reading and reader self-identification at home. It is also important to consider that school and home-based texts can be quite different. Enjoying some kinds of texts in school may not predict one's enjoyment of other kinds of texts out of school, which might explain the comparatively moderate correlation between students' enjoyment of reading at home and in school ( $r = 0.59$ ).

Finally, it is noteworthy that viewing reader identity as an important part of one's overall self-identity was more highly correlated with enjoying reading and seeing oneself as a reader in school ( $r = 0.71$  and  $r = 0.77$ , respectively) than with enjoying reading and seeing oneself as a reader at home ( $r = 0.52$  and  $r = 0.53$ , respectively). This suggests that students were more oriented toward the nature and frequency of their school-based

reading practices than toward home reading habits as criteria for determining reader identity. My interviews with youth added support to this interpretation, as students tended to agree that readers were individuals who enjoyed reading frequently, across home and school contexts. Students who did not enjoy reading in school – or who did so infrequently or only to earn a grade – were less inclined to self-identify as readers.

### **Reading Self-Efficacy**

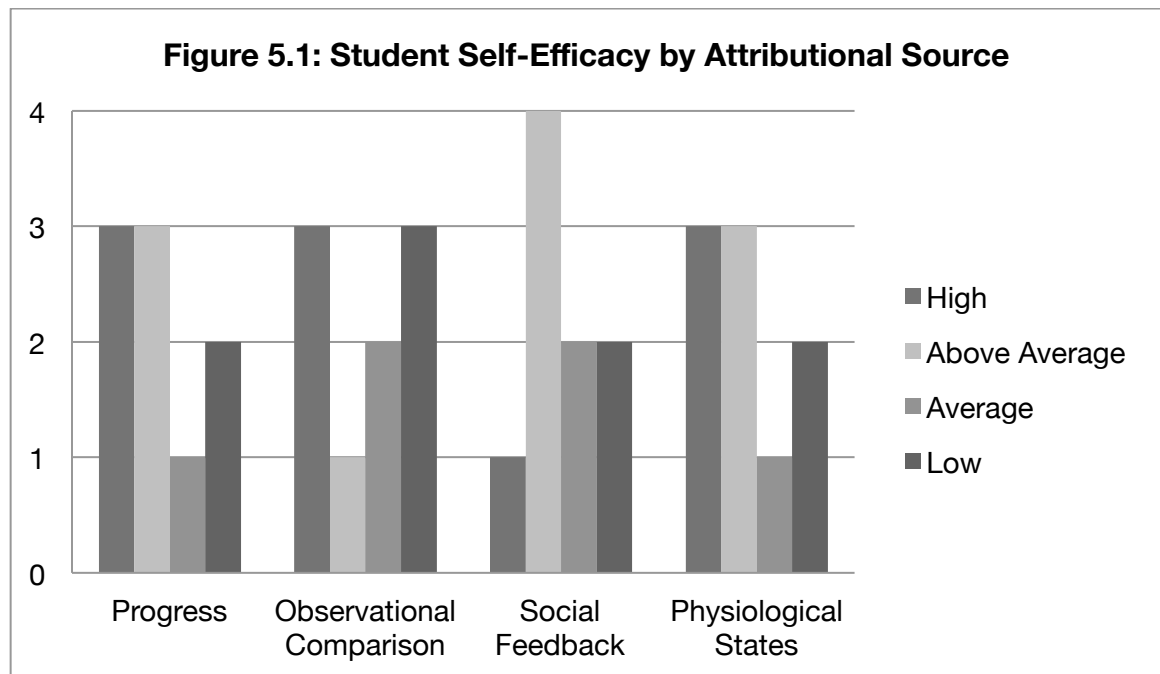
In addition to components of reader identity, I measured students' reading self-efficacy using the Reader Self-Perception Scale 2 (RSPS2) (Henk, Marinak, & Melnick, 2012/2013). This 47-item survey instrument was designed to examine "how adolescents in grades 7 through 10 feel about themselves as readers of print-based texts" (Henk, Marinak, & Melnick, 2012/2013, p. 312). Although the student participants in my study were outside this age range, I chose to use this instrument for two reasons. First, I expected that youth in their first months of grade 11 would not be drastically different from youth in grade 10. And second, I reasoned that this instrument would still be useful for providing a sense of the general distribution of self-efficacy beliefs (i.e., how youth compared to one another) across a group of students. Once again, nine students consented to my analysis of their survey responses. Items from the RSPS2 are included as survey items 18 through 64 in Appendix D.

The RSPS2 includes four scales related to four factors previously shown to influence students' self-efficacy. These factors include (a) one's past performances, (b) comparisons to others, (c) feedback from others, and (d) physiological cues. The RSPS2 scales corresponding with these factors are Progress, Observational Comparison, Social

Feedback, and Physiological States, respectively. As Henk and colleagues (2012/2013) explain:

Progress (PR) items require students to compare past and present performance ... whereas Observational Comparison (OC) items ask students to think about how their performance match with those of classmates ... Items representing Social Feedback (SF) address students' perceptions of the input they receive about their reading from teachers, parents, and peers ... Finally, Physiological States (PS) items inquire about how reading makes students feel internally ... (p. 313)

Based on students' scores on these four scales, I was able to determine whether students' self-efficacy beliefs were high, above average, average, or low in relation to each of the factors listed above. An overview of my participants' reading self-efficacy beliefs is presented in Figure 5.1.



Again, it is apparent that students in Ms. Bennett's American Literature and Composition class – or, at least, the students in this sample – held a range of self-perceptions as readers. For each of the four sources of self-efficacy beliefs listed above, I identified participants who scored in the high, above average, average, and low ranges. In other words, I found youth who were very confident readers, youth who were not confident at all, and youth who positioned themselves between these two extremes. The distributions in Figure 5.1 are similar to some of the reader identity distributions described in the previous section, as just about half of participants scored at the upper ends of the four self-efficacy scales. Strong correlations between students' total RSPS2 scores and their responses to several reader identity items (items 1-4 and 8 in Table 5.1 above;  $r = 0.72, 0.79, 0.73, 0.71$ , and  $0.82$ , respectively) indicated that, indeed, as students' self-efficacy increased, the positivity of their reader identities also tended to increase (or vice versa).

While it is not possible to see in the figure above, I also found that students' levels of self-efficacy tended to be consistent across the four scales. With one exception, participants' scores were distributed across only one or two adjacent self-efficacy levels. Two students showed "low" self-efficacy on all four scales; three demonstrated "average" or "above average" self-efficacy across the scales; and three showed consistently "above average" or "high" levels of reading self-efficacy. The final participant demonstrated high self-efficacy based on her progress and physiological states while reading, average self-efficacy based on social feedback, and low self-efficacy based on her self-comparisons to others.

In interviews, when I asked students about their confidence as readers, they



typically based their responses on how well they believed they could decode and comprehend texts. For example, Anna (one of the students who showed low self-efficacy on the RSPS2) did not feel confident because she struggled with “sounding out words, or pronunciation.” Though she could sometimes use context clues to identify unknown words, she noted that other times she would “kind of give up” when reading challenging texts. Anna also felt less confident because she did not enjoy reading. She explained, “I learned at a young age that I didn’t like reading and that I didn’t wanna do it” (November 6, Interview). By contrast, based on their decoding and comprehension skills, Michael and Jocelyn were very confident readers. Jocelyn explained, “I actually feel pretty confident in my reading skills. Like I don’t really struggle with words or analyzing what’s going on” (November 12, Interview). Michael, too, felt confident because he “usually [knows] ... what it’s talking about when I’m reading ... I usually don’t have to read it twice” (November 11, Interview).

### **Perceptions of School-Based Reading**

Finally, my survey included nine items designed to measure students’ perceptions of school-based reading in three categories: the extent to which they found classroom texts interesting (two items), whether they considered school-based reading to be personally meaningful (two items), and whether students understood reading to be a variable practice (five items). These nine items, as well as the distribution of student responses, are presented in Table 5.3. Again, nine youth consented to analysis of their responses.

**Table 5.3: Student Perceptions of School Reading (n = 9)**

<b>Survey Item</b>	<b>Strongly Agree (%)</b>	<b>Agree (%)</b>	<b>Undecided (%)</b>	<b>Disagree (%)</b>	<b>Strongly Disagree (%)</b>	<b>M<sup>a</sup></b>
(1) There are many different ways to read in school.	11.1	44.4	33.3	11.1	-	3.56
(2) There is only one right way to read in school.	11.1	11.1	22.2	33.3	22.2	2.56
(3) It is important to read different kinds of materials in school.	33.3	55.5	-	11.1	-	4.11
(4) My teachers think it is important to read different kinds of materials in school.	33.3	66.6	-	-	-	4.33
(5) My friends think it is important to read different kinds of materials in school.	-	33.3	44.4	22.2	-	3.11
(6) Mostly, the things my teachers assign to read are interesting.	11.1	11.1	22.2	55.5	-	2.78
(7) My teachers don't assign readings that students like me are interested in.	11.1	22.2	33.3	33.3	-	3.11
(8) Mostly, the things my teachers assign to read are important to me.	-	22.2	44.4	22.2	11.1	2.78
(9) My teachers don't assign readings that are important to students like me.	-	22.2	33.3	33.3	11.1	2.67

<sup>a</sup> Survey scale: strongly agree = 5, agree = 4, undecided = 3, disagree = 2, strongly disagree = 1

Based on responses to the first two survey items, it is clear that at least a subset of Ms. Bennett's students recognized school-based reading as an activity with multiple possibilities for enactment. About half of respondents agreed that there were different ways to read in school, while only two students believed that only one way of reading was possible. Furthermore, nearly all these students agreed that it was important to read different kinds of materials, and all believed that their teachers valued different reading materials. These results suggest that a sizable portion of Ms. Bennett's students had experienced reading different kinds of materials in school, or that they at least recognized textual variety as an academic ideal. Thus, one might expect these students to have approached a multimodal and multitextual curriculum with familiarity or acceptance.

Students' overall ratings of the interestingness and importance of school-based reading were less positive, but also less clearly interpretable. Asked if their school-based reading assignments were interesting and personally meaningful, only two students agreed with each of these items. On the other hand, similarly few students responded that their reading assignments were *uninteresting* or *unimportant*. A number of students were undecided on each of these final four survey items, and it appears that some were not consistent in their responses (e.g., the number of youth who agreed that reading assignments were interesting does not match the number who disagreed that reading assignments were uninteresting). Indeed, closer examination of students' responses on items six through nine show relatively weak negative correlations between "opposite" items (for items 6 and 7,  $r = -0.19$ ; for items 8 and 9,  $r = -0.34$ ) when we might expect stronger relationships.

It is possible to interpret these responses in several ways. First, such results might

indicate that students in this sample were generally ambivalent about the interestingness and importance of school-based reading. This interpretation is supported by the proportion of youth who were “undecided” about these survey items – some of whom disagreed (for instance) that texts were interesting, but were undecided about whether texts were necessarily *uninteresting* to students like them. Second, it is possible that the wording of these items contributed to mixed responses. Items 6 and 8 include “mostly” as a qualifier while items 7 and 9 do not. Items 7 and 9 also specify interestingness and important for “students like me,” while items 6 and 8 are more general. One can imagine that these nuances might result in more complicated data. Finally, it is possible that that some youth did not understand or did not carefully read the survey questions, particularly when students have provided apparently contradictory responses; however, such responses comprised a very small part of the data set. Overall, it seems most reasonable to conclude that the students in this sample held varied and sometimes mixed beliefs about the interestingness and importance of school-based texts – perhaps because of differences in materials across classes and school settings.

While limited in their scope, the above survey results provide helpful background for understanding the context in which students in Room 200 might have experienced classroom discourses of reading. Already willing to consider school-based reading as multifaceted or multipurposed, Ms. Bennett’s students may have been more comfortable engaging in varied reading practices (therefore enacting, and accepting through instruction, more diverse discourses). In addition, although students in this sample reported some general disinterest in school-based texts, deeper analysis of their responses suggests that their collective attitudes toward school-based reading were more complex.

## **Summary**

Collectively, the survey results outlined above indicate that Ms. Bennett's classroom included students with many different reader identities, levels of reading self-efficacy, and perspectives on the definitions, interestingness, and importance of school-based reading. In addition, it is clear that the factors that contributed to students' perceptions as readers were variable, interrelated, and complex. Having described these general trends in students' reader identities, self-efficacy, and perceptions of school reading, I will now turn toward analyses of how curriculum and pedagogy worked to discursively define reading practices in Ms. Bennett's American Literature and Composition class. Specifically, I consider the kinds of reading that Ms. Bennett and her students valued, how they defined these ways of reading in practice, and what it ultimately meant to be a reader in this context.

### **Finding "Reading" in Discourse**

How does one go about identifying definitions of reading in a classroom that includes little explicit discussion of reading practice? As I noted earlier, although Ms. Bennett's curriculum included opportunities for students to work with a range of texts in different ways, she only occasionally engaged in direct reading instruction. In addition, Ms. Bennett and her students rarely discussed how or why they read in direct terms. Thus, in order to explore how reading was defined and valued in Room 200, I focused on understanding how classroom participants construed the practices and goals of reading through their language and actions (i.e., discourses). More specifically, I worked to infer classroom definitions and values of reading based on the ways in which participants

discussed and interacted with texts.

Drawing on Gee's (2011) methods of discourse analysis, I developed a series of broad analytic questions designed to uncover the "whos" and "whats" of reading practice in Ms. Bennett's classroom. These questions included:

What texts do classroom participants use to find or make meaning?

How do classroom participants gain or make meaning with these texts?

What sorts of meaning do classroom participants intend to gain or make?

How do classroom participants make use of the meanings gained or created?

I based these questions on several of Gee's (2011) discursive "building tasks" – or ways of "build[ing] things in the world through language" (p. 17) – to examine how classroom participants enacted reading, assigned significance or value to different reading practices, or privileged some reading practices over others.<sup>4</sup> By asking these questions in the context of various text-based activities, I sought to identify the "'big D' Discourses" – or the "whos-doing-whats" – of making meaning with texts in this space (Gee, 2011, p. 30). In other words, through analyses of classroom artifacts and participants' language, I set out to find the "characteristic [ways] of saying, doing, and being" (Gee, 2011, p. 30) that demonstrated individuals' positions and commitments as readers in Ms. Bennett's classroom. My responses to the questions above also helped me to answer two others:

If these are the ways that participants make meaning from text, what is reading?

If making meaning from these texts in these ways is reading, who is a reader?

All together, these questions charted my heuristic path from discourse (text, language,

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<sup>4</sup> These topics correspond with the following building tasks, respectively: "Practices," "Significance," "Politics," and "Sign Systems and Knowledge."

and action), to “big D” Discourse, and finally to broader ideologies of reading and readers in this classroom setting.

I will now summarize the major ways in which participants, through their work and discussions around texts, discursively defined and valued reading in their classroom. In the interest of clarity, I have chosen to organize my discussion as a general narrative of reading practices in Room 200, synthesizing my analyses of the kinds of texts participants read (including forms and genres), how they read them, and the meanings they made with them. To provide some additional guidance, I have also separated my discussion into several sections describing participants’ different goals for reading practice (or the different kinds of meaning they made with texts). In Room 200, these goals included: reading for literary understanding, reading for information, reading for discourse, and reading for inquiry. Throughout these sections, I weave together data from classroom observations, curricular artifacts, and participant interviews.

### **Definitions and Values for Reading in Room 200**

#### **A Focus on Print-Based Texts**

As I will soon demonstrate, participants in Ms. Bennett’s American Literature and Composition class worked with texts in ways that suggested multiple definitions of reading and reading practice – some of which depended on making meaning with various, multimodal materials. However, classroom participants – including both Ms. Bennett and her students – also appeared to hold basic ideological beliefs about reading that privileged print-based text as the most natural (or perhaps most obvious) kind of text with which to engage in academic reading practices.

In the previous chapter, I briefly described Ms. Bennett's motivations for incorporating a range of multimodal texts into her American Literature and Composition curriculum. Once again, this is how she described one of her central goals:

I think part of that ... is an element of differentiation ... because **I know not all kids are readers**, and that they're not going to get the same thing out of reading a *Time* magazine article that I might. So then I think it's important to **expose them to other ways of getting that information**. So whether we listen to something on the radio or whether we watch something on TV, I think it's just trying to make sure that every kid, that there's something that kind of appeals to them, or that **I'm kind of playing to the strengths of everybody in the class as opposed to** just what I would prefer, which would be **to just sit down and read something**. (November 15, Interview)

Beyond demonstrating her desire to engage all youth with a variety of textual materials, Ms. Bennett's comments here also shed light on how she conceptualized reading as a learning practice. The bolded phrases in the excerpt above suggest that Ms. Bennett viewed reading primarily as an activity related to comprehending print-based texts. For instance, to support her statement that "not all kids are readers," Ms. Bennett first pointed to students who might not enjoy reading or fully understand a printed article. Thus, she construed a significant connection between non-readers and challenges related to understanding print-based texts, and she identified successful engagement with printed texts as a significant criterion for determining which students *are* readers. In addition, Ms. Bennett positioned interactions with others kinds of texts as significantly different from "reading." In addition to framing audio-visual texts, for example, as "other ways of getting ... information" (ways that are not "reading"), she explicitly describes work with such texts as "opposed to ... just [sitting] down and [reading] something" like a printed magazine article. These features of Ms. Bennett's discourse would suggest that she, like many high school English teachers, held an ideology of reading – or a common-sense



belief about what comprises “reading” – that centered on the primacy of successfully decoding and comprehending print-based materials like books and articles.

In some ways, Ms. Bennett’s curriculum and pedagogy supported this interpretation. While I have already shown that Room 200 was filled with multimodal materials, very few learning activities depended on audio or visual texts alone. For each of Ms. Bennett’s major instructional units, the central texts around which other texts and activities were organized (e.g., *Good People* and *The Other Wes Moore*) were exclusively or predominantly print-based. When the class did draw on other kinds of texts, they usually did so in the context of or as means of better understanding printed texts. Indeed, as Ms. Bennett described above, she primarily used audio-visual materials as an alternative way of “exposing” students to “that information” which they could not “get” from print texts alone. Although these observations do not speak directly to classroom definitions of “reading,” they do indicate that print-based reading was most valued.

Many of the independent reading strategies that Ms. Bennett taught or modeled – whether explicitly or implicitly – also focused on applications to print texts. For example, prior to reading an article about poverty in the United States, students received the following instructions (original emphasis included):

*As you read this article, show evidence of your thinking by marking up the text. Here are some notations you can start with:*

- √ Confirms something you already know or have heard before
- Contradicts something you had thought or heard before
- ? Confuses you or is something you have a question about
- + Is a new piece of information that you never knew before
- ! Is surprising or you find this to be very interesting

In addition to a symbol, you must write out the thought you have about that passage, statistic, or example. 3 per page.

Language arts and reading educators will recognize these instructions as a set of common strategies for annotating print texts, monitoring one's understanding, and supporting reading comprehension. In my observations, students encountered relatively little instruction related to comprehending non-print texts (although, again, this is related to the fact that most primary classroom texts were print-focused).

The presence of printed texts also seemed to be most salient for youth participants in Ms. Bennett's classroom. When I interviewed students about the kinds of things they read in American Literature and Composition, they focused, time and again, on predominantly print-based articles, plays, and novels. Without my prompting, they barely mentioned texts like visual infographics, videos, or audio-recorded speeches and interviews – even those with printed supplements like transcripts. Indeed, by the times of our interviews toward the end of the school term, some students had forgotten that they had worked at all with some audio-visual texts. Anna, for example, seemed genuinely surprised (and amused) when I reminded her of a documentary the class had watched not long before: “Oh, yeah. I remember that now,” she said, laughing. “I’m like, what?”

Interestingly, the students with whom I spoke generally appreciated the use of non-print texts in their classes (as I will discuss later in this chapter). It appears, however, that they simply did not consider their work with these texts to be a form of “reading” practice. Despite the earlier survey results that indicated their openness to different forms of reading in school, students' discourse, like Ms. Bennett's, reflected ideological assumptions about reading that privileged print-based materials.

## Reading for Literary Understanding

Even so, participants' goals for reading – or what they aimed to accomplish through working with texts – appeared to be more varied. First among these goals was a focus on reading for literary understanding. Indeed, in a class centrally concerned with reading and writing in response to American literature, it came as no surprise that reading for literary understanding was a clear, consistent, and almost daily practice. As students read texts including historical documents, poems, a contemporary play, and a modern novel, they explored topics like character motivation, literary theme, figurative language, conflict, and metaphor.

Typically, Ms. Bennett supported students' reading for literary understanding by asking them to complete reading comprehension guides or to participate in interpretive activities related to their primary classroom texts. For example, students completed several "study guides" related to different portions of the play *Good People*, the first of which included questions like the following:

Find a sentence in the play (Scene 3) that reveals what Mike thinks it means to be called "lace-curtain." Write it out, including the page number. Explain how this contrasts with how Mike views himself and his success.

Think about why the playwright chose to include bingo in this play. Why does he have the voice of a priest calling out the numbers? Explain the literal and metaphorical meanings of that game in this play.

Also related to *Good People*, students completed a creative assignment in which they defined the words "dying," "surviving," "living," and "thriving," using both words and found images, before matching those definitions with characters and quotations from the play. The "learning targets" for this assignment, as stated on an information handout for students, were to:

Cite strong textual evidence to support what the text says explicitly as well as inferred [and to] show how a theme is developed over the course of a text through details and characters.

And an essay assignment designed to assess students' understanding of several American poems included the following prompts (from which students chose one):

What attitude towards immigrants does "New Colossus" communicate?  
What attitude towards immigrants does "Unguarded Gates" communicate?  
How do the poems compare and contrast in their attitudes?

Through these kinds of class assignments, students worked to identify explicit meanings in texts, to identify important literary elements, and to infer meanings based on their knowledge of literary devices, personal experiences, and other background knowledge.

What do these excerpts from Room 200's American Literature curriculum suggest about classroom definitions of reading and reading practice, particularly related to reading for literary understanding? First, it is important to note (once again) that most of the texts that students read with this purpose were predominantly print-based. In one exceptional case, students analyzed a song (Tracy Chapman's "Fast Car") as a means of further exploring a central character in *Good People*. This suggests that, for participants in Room 200, reading for literary understanding was a primarily print-based activity.

Second, this kind of reading included practices that focused on "uncovering" meanings that were assumed to be inherent in texts. In the reading guides and prompts above, phrases like "find a sentence ... that reveals" indicate that students were to simply identify (and not necessarily construct) meanings within texts. Language like "explain the literal and metaphorical meanings" and "what attitude toward immigrants" also suggests that there were single, correct responses to these questions (and therefore particular meanings in the texts), as the grammatical singularity of words like "*the* ... meanings"

(my emphasis) and “what attitude” seem to close off possibilities for multiple meanings. Thus, in these cases, the classroom curriculum discursively defined reading for literary understanding as a process that was more procedural than interpretive. Thus, successful readers were individuals who were able to identify these buried literary meanings.

### **Reading for Information**

Reading for information, another central goal for reading in Ms. Bennett’s class, followed similar patterns in definition and practice. As students worked to explore questions related to immigration, race, racism, and poverty, classroom texts served as their primary sources for statistics, real-world anecdotes, and literary examples related to these topics. Indeed, curricular documents throughout the trimester suggested a sort of mining of different kinds of texts, generally for the purposes of answering questions and preparing for class discussions. For example, a key “learning target” for graded class discussions included preparing for conversations “by gathering evidence from multiple resources.” To do this, students used tools like simple graphic organizers to identify and categorize discrete pieces of information, including statistics and quotations. Such activities framed reading as a practice focused on collecting facts and, again, suggested that meaning could be found already constructed within texts.

Other portions of assignments did encourage additional interpretation of texts, however. As students prepared for organized class discussions, for instance, they not only gathered information related to key discussion topics, but also generated responses to their own questions related to those topics – often in relation to their own experiences and background knowledge. In these cases, reading for information was less procedural,

pushing students to engage in transactions with texts to make meaning.

In Room 200, Ms. Bennett encouraged (and indeed required) youth to work with multiple kinds of texts to gather information. Again, print-based texts were clearly dominant. However, when engaged in this form of reading, students also turned to visual infographics (which included alphanumeric print in addition to different types of charts and graphs), a documentary film, and several video-recorded speeches. Multiple genres served as sources of information, including informational as well as literary texts.

Overall, reading for information was one of the most prevalent ways of reading in Ms. Bennett's classroom (second only to reading for inquiry, which I will discuss below). Students engaged in this kind of reading through work with a broad base of text types, and with multiple orientations with respect to "gathering," constructing, and interpreting textual meaning. It is important to note that the class's focus on reading for information was heavily influenced by Ms. Bennett's adoption of the Common Core Standards for English Language Arts, which required syntheses of "multiple sources of information presented in different media or formats (e.g., visually, quantitatively) as well as in words" to support arguments (p. 40). Indeed, several class assignments explicitly listed "Learning Targets/Common Core Standards" to guide students' work. This provides one example of how the adoption of particular educational standards can significantly influence how teachers and students define, value, and enact reading practices in classrooms.

### **Reading for Discourse**

Beyond reading for literary understanding and information, reading for discourse – including markers of social relationships, identities, and status – was an important

practice in Room 200. Students' discussions about homes and communities in Boston, part of an introduction to the setting of the play *Good People*, demonstrated this clearly.

Late in September, Ms. Bennett began one class period with a set of difficult questions:

What are the visible signs of wealth?  
What are the visible signs of poverty?  
What are the more reticent signs of wealth and poverty?  
(Think about how people act, talk, believe, deal with conflict, etc.)

Students first responded to these questions in their reading journals, before Ms. Bennett assigned them another task: to read, as a class, a series of photographs projected on the classroom Smart Board. These images included the exteriors of six homes in Boston, ranging from low-income, public housing to large mansions. Given these images, Ms. Bennett asked students to consider another set of questions:

Who lives here? How many people? Young or old?  
What sort of jobs do they have? How much money do they make?  
What might be their hobbies?  
What is their personality like?  
What words come to mind when describing this place?  
What do you envision the neighborhood to be like?

Over the next twenty to thirty minutes, Ms. Bennett and her students discussed how the six photographs reflected material conditions of wealth and poverty, as well as what these conditions suggested about the homes' and communities' inhabitants. They discussed, for example, building materials (plain brick versus granite), automobiles (new versus old, luxury versus economy), proximity to local businesses, and the presence of nearby graffiti. In their analyses, students drew heavily on prior knowledge and their own experiences in the world. They concluded that residents of the "nicer" homes and neighborhoods would be generally upper class, most likely White professionals, while residents of the other neighborhoods would likely be racial minorities or less affluent.

By leading students in this activity, Ms. Bennett significantly expanded definitions of reading and reading practice in her classroom. First, she positioned photographic images as texts to be read. Prior to this discussion, students had worked mainly with print-based materials. Physical locations and communities also became sites for reading and interpretation, as students used what they observed and inferred to draw conclusions about the world. And perhaps most strikingly, Ms. Bennett guided students toward reading people, identities, and indicators of social positioning. Her questions about the visible and covert signs of wealth and poverty, in particular, reflected an understanding of the world as a form of text to be interpreted. In other words, she expanded her curriculum to include reading practices often associated with critical literacy. Students read for social as well as textual meanings. In the context of these expanded definitions of reading and reading practice, successful readers were individuals who could, in the words of Freire, interpret the word as well as the world.

Students also read for discourse in other kinds of texts, including print texts. While reading *The Other Wes Moore*, for instance, one of Ms. Bennett's reading guides asked students, "How does our environment shape who we are?" Overall instructions for completing the guide were as follows:

Each of the following passages describes an element of the environment the Wes Moores are growing up in. Explain how this could impact or has impacted the lives of those boys. In other words, what would this mean for someone growing up here?

In a related assignment, students identified quotations from the novel that showed how "education," "economics," "mother/family," "law enforcement/criminal justice system," "race," and "location/environment" were "an influence on the lives of both the Wes



Moore's." As in the discussion activity above, Ms. Bennett tasked students with reading social and environmental features for their meanings in relation individuals' lives.

### **Reading for Inquiry**

Finally, reading for inquiry was perhaps the most prevalent Discourse of reading in Ms. Bennett's classroom. Indeed, in many ways, this Discourse subsumed each of the others, as students' reading for information, literary understanding, and discourse in texts ultimately contributed to their attempts to answer guiding question related to wealth and poverty, race and equality, and the accessibility of "the American Dream." As students read, viewed, and listened to various texts throughout the trimester, they continuously connected their learning to these big topics, as well as to more incremental, self-identified questions.

For example, during the class's unit based on *The Other Wes Moore*, students worked toward addressing these guiding questions:

Has Martin Luther King, Jr.'s vision been fully realized in the United States?  
What more can or should be done?

While Ms. Bennett developed these questions in consultation with her teaching colleague, she also required students to identify at least three of their own related, "smaller questions" (e.g., "Are men of color unnecessarily targeted by law enforcement?").

Furthermore, in order to answer these kinds of questions, students also must have engaged with texts in order to develop full understandings of the questions themselves. For instance, before addressing the overall question related to Martin Luther King, Jr.'s vision, Ms. Bennett's students first had to read to learn what the vision entailed.

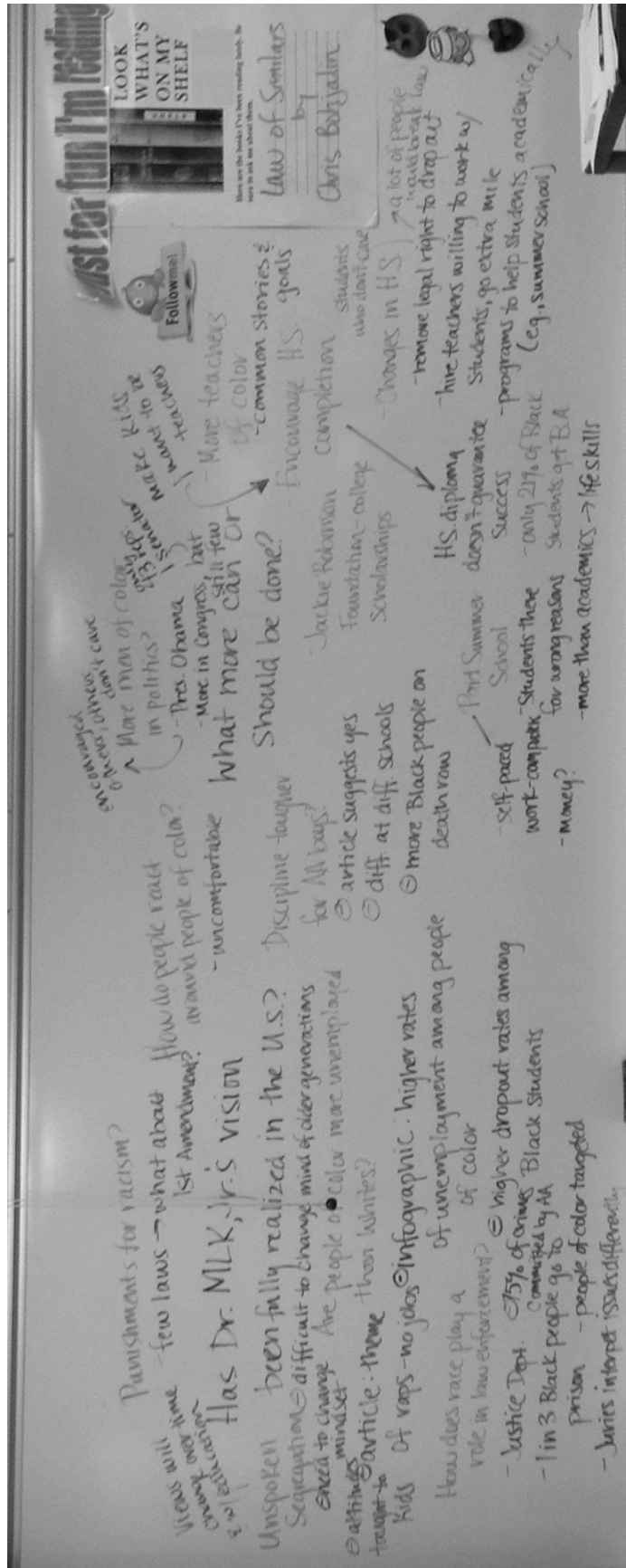
These kinds of classroom activities framed reading as a practice intended to answer

questions and solve problems. In these cases, readers were individuals who were able to engage with texts not only to retrieve information, but also to direct that information toward a particular, focused inquiry. In addition, activities like inquiry-based class discussions positioned this kind of reading as a collective and collaborative process. Certainly, Ms. Bennett required her students to arrive and their own answers to guiding questions, but she also expected them to extend, complicate, and challenge one another's responses. This was clear in her directions to youth to directly build on their peers' interpretations of class texts. In practice, students did this well, as Figure 5.1 illustrates. This image shows the product of Room 200's discussion of Martin Luther King Jr.'s vision for racial equality: a whiteboard diagram tracking their conversation. The many questions, bullet points, and multi-directional arrows reflect a recursive, text-based discussion focused on thoroughly exploring the central questions at hand.

### **Summary**

This section has focused on describing the various ways in which participants defined, valued, and enacted reading in Ms. Bennett's American Literature and Composition class. Based on observations, analyses of artifacts, and interviews, I concluded that although Ms. Bennett and her students most explicitly defined reading as a way of making meaning with print texts, they participated in classroom practices that reflected much broader reading practices. While engaged in four key types of reading – reading for literary understanding, reading for information, reading for discourse, and reading for inquiry – students read a range of print-based and audiovisual texts in pursuit of textual, social, and personal meanings.

Figure 5.2: Diagram of Student Discussion



In other words, discursive definitions of reading in Room 200 included goals for making several kinds of meaning, through different means of interpretation, with multimodal texts. These definitions also expanded what it meant to be a reader, perhaps most notably including attention to students' abilities to critically read and understand the word as well as the world.

In the next section, I will turn to an examination of students' reading self-efficacy and reader identities in the context of these class definitions of reading and reading practice. I do so by presenting and comparing the profiles of two individual students – Anna and Michael – in which I aim to highlight how classroom discourses and reading practices did or did not influence these students' self-perceptions as readers. In addition to observations and survey data, these profiles include excerpts from student interviews and student achievement data. I have selected these students as key participants because, first, because they represent different profiles with respect to reader identity, self-efficacy, and achievement. They also demonstrate commonalities across student participants' experiences with reading in Room 200.

### **Reader Identity and Self-Efficacy in the Context of Discourse**

#### **Anna**

A junior in Ms. Bennett's class, Anna was often one of the first youth to arrive in Room 200 after the sixth period bell. As a student, Anna described herself as “organized, prepared, and energetic” – three descriptors that were well suited to her participation in American Literature and Composition. She completed reading and writing assignments diligently and on time. She volunteered to answer questions, to lead small groups, and to

read aloud. When the class read *Good People*, a play about social class and economic mobility, I noted that Anna was one of the few students to regularly (and eagerly, I thought) reprise a major speaking role each day. Furthermore, she did all this with laughter and a daily smile. As she said to me, “I normally enjoy school. I like learning.” From an observer’s perspective, Anna’s experience in Ms. Bennett’s class appeared to be no different.

Anna did not like English classes, however. When we met during her study hall one afternoon, she explained:

I’m not good at English. Like when we’re reading, I don’t enjoy big words. I just kind of skip over them, because I don’t know what they mean or just don’t want to read them because I’ll probably not do it right, say it right.  
(November 6, Interview)

Anna’s previous standardized reading assessment scores (as low as the 17<sup>th</sup> percentile in her sophomore year of high school) seemed to indicate that she did struggle with comprehending texts. Neither did she like to read in many cases. At home, she sometimes enjoyed reading magazines and comics (she appreciated the pictures). However, reading books, aside from the occasional “teen novel” or “theological book,” was rare. In school, she preferred to spend her time in math classes, where she felt that she excelled. She “learned at a young age that [she] didn’t like reading and ... didn’t want to do it.”

When I understood how little Anna liked to read (despite her apparent engagement in class), I was unsurprised to find that she neither saw herself as a reader nor believed that others would identify her as a reader – in any context. Indeed, she believed readers were people who read often and with pleasure; a reader was “someone who goes to the library a lot – at least once a week.” By contrast, a reader was not someone who read

“just to try to get a good grade,” as Anna did frequently in Ms. Bennett’s class.

Generally, she also was not a confident reader. Her total score on the RSPS2 was the lowest among the nine students in the survey sample described above. “I feel like I’m [farther] behind in my reading skills than most kids,” she told me. She was self-conscious about her decoding skills and vocabulary knowledge, and, despite having some strategies for persevering through challenging texts (e.g., using context clues), she would sometimes “give up” in the face of too many unknowns. By many accounts (including her own), Anna would likely be considered a “struggling reader”: a student with low interest, low reading achievement, and minimal personal engagement with classroom texts.

In the context of Ms. Bennett’s curriculum, Anna’s attitudes as a reader were not much different. When I asked what types of reading she believed were important in school, she identified textbooks as the most prominent kinds of texts. Elaborating on reading in Room 200, she immediately mentioned “those dry novels,” important “because they relate to us, kind of”:

In the way that they say things. Like in *The Other Wes Moore*, when they talk about how different situations are, growing up. Are your parents responsible for your actions and stuff. As like, well that’s a good thing to think about in this context, in general. Are my parents responsible for me, or am I responsible of myself? (November 6, Interview)

I found Anna’s response here interesting, particularly because of her acknowledgement that Ms. Bennett had chosen classroom texts that were “supposed to be” relatable and engaging for her students. By referencing *The Other Wes Moore* in the context of specific social questions, Anna also recognized and participated in the discourses of reading for information and reading for inquiry that were so important in Room 200. However, these

aspects of the curriculum – relatable texts framed by “big questions,” as Ms. Bennett would say – were not effective for increasing Anna’s interest, self-efficacy, or self-identification related to reading. Why?

Primarily, she believed she had little choice in the specific texts that she read in Ms. Bennett’s classroom, and, as she put it, “I don’t like books chosen for me.” Had she been allowed to choose a text to read, Anna believed that she would have felt more confident as a reader “because I chose it for myself so I know that I’m gonna like it.” Indeed, she appeared to enjoy reading for inquiry on her own terms, such as for personal Bible study. Anna specifically noted that she would feel most engaged and confident as a reader “if [she] had ... a theologic question that [she] could ... answer through ... reading something.” It seems that it was Ms. Bennett’s choice of texts – not her class’s focus on reading for information or inquiry – that did not inspire Anna’s interest or self-efficacy in reading.

While the primary texts in Room 200 did little to encourage Anna’s identification or engagement as a reader, she appreciated some of the supplemental classroom texts, many of which were multimodal. For example, she enjoyed reading graphs “because they related to [her] math side more.” Audio-visual texts like videos and recorded interviews also increased her self-efficacy when reading. Referring to a documentary on minimum wages, Anna noted:

I like that she used the video and we got to like write our responses down and things. Because then it helped me kind of relate to [an article] more, because visually seeing [things] happen and realizing what’s going on ... I kind of knew more of what I was doing, I feel like. Because I have more, I guess, skills ... by watching things and taking notes – versus just reading. (November 6, Interview)

It seems that Anna's experiences with these multimodal texts did not influence her identity as a reader – most likely because, as noted above, she associated being a reader primarily with being a frequent consumer of print-based books. At the very least, however, these multimodal texts increased her comfort with respect to reading and comprehending classroom texts.

### **Michael**

Also a junior at South Suburban High School, Michael was typically one of the quieter students in Ms. Bennett's American Literature and Composition class. He participated in classroom activities when required to so, but rarely volunteered otherwise. I surmised that his reluctance to participate more proactively might have been related to some self-reservations in English classes, which Michael described as “not really [his] strong suit.” Still, he was a successful student, with an impressive grade point average and high scores on previous standardized reading assessments, and he enjoyed school much of the time. By my observations, Michael lived up to the “studious” descriptor he gave himself during our Monday afternoon interview.

Unlike Anna, Michael was generally both a self-identified and self-efficacious reader. Although he preferred reading fiction to nonfiction, he was willing to read the latter when required. Because of this flexibility and his interest in adventure books (e.g., the *Percy Jackson* series), Michael considered himself a reader. A reader, he said, was someone who would “sit down and read books” regularly – even when he did not enjoy them. While Michael did not enjoy reading many of the texts in Ms. Bennett's class (“I'm more of a person that likes the adventure in the book,” he explained, “and ours are more



of like historical pieces”), he nonetheless saw himself as a reader because he “read the books that [he had] to.” For Michael, reader identity was determined primarily by reading frequency, not interest or enjoyment.

Michael described himself as a “fairly confident” reader, an assertion that echoed his high total score on the RSPS2. He based this self-assessment on his abilities to comprehend texts successfully and quickly, noting, “I usually know ... what it’s talking about when I’m reading it. I usually don’t have to read it twice.” Having background knowledge also made him feel self-confident, particularly when other students did not share that same knowledge. Michael recalled one time during the class’s reading of *Good People*, for example, when he felt especially self-efficacious as a reader:

[In] that play we were reading, parts of it were [about] the “lace curtain Irish,” and I knew what that meant before we, or she [Ms. Bennett] wrote the definition [on the board]. (November 11, Interview)

By contrast, Michael could recall no time when he did not feel confident as a reader in Ms. Bennett’s classroom.

Michael understood Ms. Bennett’s curriculum to be focused on the past. He described important texts (in Room 200 and in school in general) as:

historical reading where it teaches you about the past and tells you what’s happened so that we don’t repeat it ... It just helps use learn what we’re supposed to be doing ... what we’ve done to help or hurt things, and what we should have changed ... [It] helps us see what has been ... so that the bad things don’t repeat and good things we can be able to, either repeat or change a little bit to make it even better for the society. (November 11, Interview)

This was a fair characterization, as Ms. Bennett’s inquiry-based curriculum centered on questions related to historical and social progress. Michael also believed such goals for reading were important, as he described reading texts like newspapers for similar

purposes. Like Anna, however, he did not find the inquiry texts in Room 200 very interesting or engaging – again because he felt little control over which texts he could read to respond to the class’s guiding questions. Neither did the inquiry-based curriculum make a difference for how he perceived himself as a reader.

Michael did sometimes feel supported by the presence of multimodal classroom texts. When he enjoyed what he read, Michael “definitely” felt most comfortable learning by “reading text.” But when he was less interested in printed texts, “sometimes the audiovisual [was] more entertaining.” “Sometimes [multimodal texts] might [also] confirm some thing that I had questions about, when just reading,” Michael explained. Ms. Bennett’s inclusion of multimodal texts in her curriculum supported Michael’s work in practices related to reading for information and reading for inquiry.

## **Summary**

I have included the two brief profiles above because they illustrate how two very different students – and very different readers – experienced discourses of reading in Ms. Bennett’s classroom in similar ways. These profiles are also representative of my findings across all five of my student interviews. Of the four prominent discourses of reading that I identified in Ms. Bennett’s classroom – reading for literary understanding, reading for discourse, reading for information, and reading for inquiry – students consistently identified the latter two as important ways of reading in Room 200. They did so mostly in their discussions of important texts and classroom assignments. Most of these students also recognized that both the texts that Ms. Bennett had selected and the guiding inquiry questions that she developed were intended to be personally meaningful

and relevant to their lives as teenage youth.

Most students acknowledged reading for inquiry as a practice that interested them generally. However, whether this way of reading successfully engaged them in Ms. Bennett's classroom depended (unsurprisingly) on the whether students felt interested in the individual texts that they read to respond to inquiry questions. Students who *were* interested by the texts felt more engaged by reading for information and inquiry in Room 200. When students did not feel that they were able to choose the texts they read, they were less interested and engaged. All students agreed that Ms. Bennett's use of varied, multimodal texts in support of reading for information and inquiry contributed to a more interesting curriculum overall.

It appears that discourses of reading in Room 200 had little changing effect on students' identities as readers. Students who positively identified as readers did so regardless of the kinds of reading and texts that were prominent in this classroom. And students who did not identify as readers were not swayed by this classroom curriculum. In my interviews, student participants based their reader identities more often on criteria in larger contexts than a single English class, arguing, for example, that readers always read (and enjoyed reading) across situations and settings. Thus, for these students, broader ideologies about readers and reading seemed to be more influential than local discourses in terms of shaping their reader identities.

On the other hand, classroom discourses of reading mattered more for students' reading self-efficacy. More specifically, when classroom definitions of reading included the use of varied, multimodal texts to gather information and to explore questions, students felt more self-efficacious – either because they felt more confident reading non-

print texts or because audiovisual texts confirmed their understanding of print texts. Thus, it seems that local definitions and values for reading practices were important for shaping students' self-perceptions as readers in this regard.

## **CHAPTER SIX**

### **Conclusions and Paths Forward**

In the previous two chapters, I presented findings from my three-month study of discourse, reader identity, and reading self-efficacy in Ms. Bennett's American Literature and Composition class. In designing and conducting this study, I sought to answer three research questions:

1. How did Ms. Bennett's students perceive themselves as readers?
2. How were classroom reading practices and goals discursively defined by curriculum and pedagogy?
3. How did these discursive definitions of reading influence individual students' reader identities and self-efficacy?

Drawing on a host of qualitative and quantitative data sources – including teacher and student voices, curricular artifacts, and my own participant observations – I aimed to tell some of the central stories of reading and of being a reader in Ms. Bennett's classroom. These are not all of the stories that transpired in those three months; they are simply the ones that I observed and the ones that participants chose to share. They are also interpretive, in the sense that I have constructed them from a necessarily limited viewpoint. While I am confident that these stories accurately capture what it was like to read in Room 200, it would be a mistake to overlook the possibilities for discovering or creating others. With the conclusion of the current study, perhaps the pursuit of such additional stories will become the province of future research projects.

In this final chapter, I first summarize what I have learned in response to each of the research questions listed above. I also consider how the answers to these questions might advance our theoretical understanding of how identity and self-efficacy develop at the intersection of discourse, cognition, and society. Next, I discuss the implications of this work for classroom teaching and learning. Finally, I identify limitations of the study, as well as possible directions for future research.

### **Overview of Findings**

#### **Research Question 1: Generally, how do students perceive themselves as readers?**

Students in Ms. Bennett's American Literature and Composition class held a wide range of attitudes toward reading, as well as diverse self-perceptions as readers. On quantitative measures of both reader identity and self-efficacy, multiple students scored at the high, middle, and low ends of these scales. Qualitative interviews confirmed that Ms. Bennett's classroom included youth who both did and did not identify as readers, and who felt very, moderately, or not at all self-efficacious when reading. Factors influencing students' self-identification as readers were primarily their interests in reading different kinds of texts, in addition to the amount of time they typically spent reading in and outside of school. Their self-efficacy beliefs depended on whether they felt confident reading (mostly print-based) texts accurately, fluently, and with comprehension. Overall, students' perceptions of school-based reading were flexible, as about half of those surveyed believed that there were multiple ways of reading in school. Fewer students, however, felt that school-based texts were personally interesting or meaningful.

## **Research Question 2: How are classroom reading practices and goals discursively defined by curriculum and pedagogy?**

My observations and analyses of curricular artifacts in Room 200 revealed four key ways of reading that were important for students' every learning. As I described above, these ways of reading included the following: reading for literary understanding, reading for information, reading for discourse, and reading for inquiry. Each of these ways of reading was associated with particular kinds of texts (e.g., print-based texts, images, and other audio-visual materials), as well as particular ways of making meaning with texts (e.g., "uncovering" inherent literary meaning, making connections to social experiences, or using texts to answer important questions).

These ways of "doing" reading to achieve specific academic and social goals were the "big D" Discourses of reading that characterized Ms. Bennett's American Literature classroom. Classroom participants enacted these Discourses through their involvement in various class activities and discussions around texts. Curricular materials, prepared by Ms. Bennett and her teaching colleague, sustained these Discourses in the ways that they described classroom texts and goals for reading, interpreting, and applying meaning from those texts.

These four classroom Discourses reflected larger ideologies – or common-sense assumptions – about what reading was and who readers were in the classroom context. Chief among these ideologies was a belief that reading involves collecting information (or evidence) for the purpose of responding to questions or making arguments. In Room 200, this ideology of reading came directly from the Common Core State Standards for English Language Arts, which place a premium on gathering and synthesizing

information from multiple sources – and which also guided many of the reading and learning activities in Ms. Bennett’s curriculum.

Other ideologies included commitments to reading as multimodal and critical. In Chapters Four and Five, for example, I highlighted the ways in which multimodal texts played a central role in classroom reading, even when print-based texts were primary. I have also shown how Ms. Bennett guided her students to read the word as well as the world, particularly focusing on how individuals enacted discourses related to wealth and social class. These practices reflect ideologies of reading that we would typically associate with critical literacies and multiple/new literacies.

**Research Question 3: How do discursive definitions of reading influence individual students’ reader identities and self-efficacy?**

In Chapter Two, drawing on van Dijk’s (1998, 2009) conceptualization of the “discourse-cognition-society triangle,” I suggested that students’ self-perceptions as readers, including their reader identities and self-efficacy, would likely be influenced by both local discourses of reading and broader social ideologies of reading and reading practice. I anticipated that youth would look toward both classroom discourses of reading as well as “common-sense” definitions of reading when describing themselves as more or less self-identified and self-efficacious readers. As I illustrated above, this was only partially true for the students in my study.

Although students’ self-efficacy beliefs did seem to depend, in part, on classroom practices, definitions, and values for reading (especially as classroom discourses encouraged reading with multimodal texts), their reader identities were unchanged by these discourses. Rather, youth depended entirely on well-established ideologies of



reading (e.g., a reader must read frequently and across contexts) when reflecting on their own identities. This suggests that while teachers might marshal features of curriculum and pedagogy to support positive developments in students' reading self-efficacy, it might be more challenging to encourage similar changes in students' overall identities as readers.

Such a finding would not be altogether surprising, as past research has shown that more encompassing self-conceptual constructs like learner identity tend to be more fixed and long-term than self-perceptions like self-efficacy, which are frequently dependent on contextual factors (Schunk & Pajares, 2009). This understanding, plus my findings related to the different influences of discourse on reader identity and self-efficacy, might suggest that a conceptual model like van Dijk's would benefit from extension to recognize the different characters of cognitive constructs. That is, a more developed model might account for closer relationships between a cognitive construct like identity or self-efficacy and either local discursive or social ideological influences. Further research should work toward this goal by further exploring ways in which individuals draw on discourse and ideology in their development of different forms of self-perception.

### **Implications in Theory and Practice**

What do these findings suggest about Ms. Bennett's classroom in the context of existing theory and research literature? In Chapter Two, I suggested several ways in which teachers might challenge dominant ideologies of reading and reading practice. I argued that perspectives from critical literacy education, culturally relevant pedagogy, and new

literacies could help teachers reframe reading as a process that moves beyond students' cognitive processing of print-based texts alone, instead positioning reading as a social activity built on deep engagement with and critique of a range of multimodal and culturally relevant materials. In some respects, Ms. Bennett's curriculum and pedagogy took up these perspectives, providing her students opportunities to read and respond to texts in non-traditional ways – for instance, through classroom discourses that called for students' critical and personal inquiry through work with many multimodal texts. Ms. Bennett also sought to include diverse texts that would be individually and culturally relevant for her students.

As I have already noted, however, the presence of these discourses and reading practices, which all seemed to challenge traditional conceptions of reading, did not have a changing effect on students' ideologies or identities as readers. That is, even while students read and synthesized multimodal materials in order to answer critical social questions, their understandings of reading – and what it meant to be a reader – remained focused on more limited uses of print texts. Neither did these discourses encourage youth to adopt more varied, positive reader identities. Why?

First, it is important to recognize that non-normative discourses of reading in Room 200 were continually in competition with other, more traditional discourses and reading practices that sustained reading as an autonomous process. These included discourses that privileged students' reading of print texts for inherent factual and literary meaning, as well as classroom practices that limited students' freedom in inquiry activities. While Ms. Bennett encouraged students to develop their own responses to inquiry questions, for example, these central questions were largely teacher-generated.

Furthermore, Ms. Bennett required students to engage in inquiry in particular ways – for instance, by identifying a certain number of sub-questions, organizing “evidence” from texts in particular ways, and engaging in certain kinds of practices during dialogic discussion (e.g., building on other students’ contributions and using transitional phrases to make connections). These sorts of structures for reading practice framed inquiry as a procedural activity, rather than as a more free-form pursuit of personally meaningful knowledge.

Because these normative discourses and reading practices were more prevalent than others in Room 200 (including those that valued critical uses of multimodal texts), it is perhaps unsurprising that students continued to rely on them (and associated ideologies of reading) to frame and reflect on their reader identities. Indeed, because activities in Ms. Bennett’s classroom did not *explicitly* position multimodal inquiry as an important way of “reading” (and, as I have demonstrated, students did not see their work with multimodal texts as a form of reading practice), it seems natural that youth would continue to depend on the firmly sedimented, dominant ideologies of reading that had developed over a decade or more of schooling. Just as multimodal texts were often ancillary in classroom practice, the non-normative discourses of reading to which they contributed were secondary in informing students’ ideologies and identities as readers.

It is also important to note that while Ms. Bennett attempted to select reading materials that would be interesting and meaningful for her students, she was not entirely successful in this regard. Several students with whom I spoke were not interested or engaged by classroom texts and were, as a result, not engaged by inquiry activities. One contributor to this apparent mismatch between Ms. Bennett’s reading choices and

students' interest in these texts might have been Ms. Bennett's limited timeframe for selecting materials. Because her American Literature and Composition curriculum was entirely new, Ms. Bennett and her teaching colleague often identified reading materials only days before their use in the classroom. This allowed little time for Ms. Bennett to evaluate students' interests and funds of knowledge (Moll & Gonzalez, 2004), a process that can require substantially more exploration and investment.

Ms. Bennett's efforts to engage in critical literacy and culturally relevant pedagogy with her students were complicated and constrained by other contextual and institutional factors. I have already identified several above. In addition, one cannot ignore the influence of the Common Core State Standards on Ms. Bennett's curriculum and pedagogy. For example, these standards strongly shaped the nature of reading for inquiry in Room 200, as Ms. Bennett directly adopted Common Core language and practices that called for the identification and integration of "evidence" from multiple text sources. These standards shaped not only the kinds of texts that students read (even requiring specific texts like The Declaration of Independence in some cases), but also *how* and *why* they read them. In this way, the Common Core standards contributed to discourses and definitions of reading – and perhaps to students' reluctance to adopt broader, non-normative ideologies of reading – in Room 200.

In contrast, students' reading self-efficacy seemed to be more positively influenced by local classroom discourses, particularly as these discourses encouraged and provided opportunities for working with multimodal texts. As I demonstrated in Chapters Four and Five, multimodal texts played an important role in Room 200. From Ms. Bennett's perspective, these texts provided means of "reaching" and engaging a wider

range of students with varying interests, identities, and skills as readers. They also served as a broad reservoir of statistics, anecdotes, and other evidence related to the class's guiding questions about poverty, racism, and the American dream. Even as Ms. Bennett's curriculum positioned multimodal texts as often supplemental to print texts, the presence of multimodal materials helped students feel more competent in their reading of printed novels, play, and articles. This finding is somewhat contradictory to students' own definitions of reading, which did not seem to include work with multimodal texts. Why, then, should access to multimodal materials increase their self-efficacy as readers?

One explanation might be that, although students did not view their work with multimodal texts as a form of reading practice, these texts nonetheless contributed to their past performances as readers in Room 200. As I explained earlier, for example, Anna recalled that multimodal texts had helped her better understand the various print texts that she was required to read. Because multimodal texts had played a part in supporting her reading previously – even if she did not consider the multimodal texts to be a part of the “reading” itself – it seems reasonable that Anna would continue to associate her access to multimodal texts with her increased confidence as a reader of print texts (assuming the texts were related to the same topics). In this way, she might have viewed multimodal texts as part of a supportive *context* for reading, which contributed to her self-efficacy.

Another possibility might be that the presence of multimodal texts, which some students perceived as more accessible sources of information, helped youth to feel more physically comfortable as they read. Particularly for youth who generally lacked confidence as readers, the knowledge that they could use multimodal materials to confirm or supplement their comprehension of print texts could have lessened their physical

apprehension or anxiety while reading, which theory suggests would contribute to higher self-efficacy on reading tasks. Indeed, both these possible explanations would find support in existing theories of self-efficacy, which identify past performances and physiological cues as key contributors to individuals' self-efficacy beliefs.

### **Implications for Teaching and Learning**

The results of this research suggest several implications for teaching and learning in high school English classrooms. First, it is notable that although Ms. Bennett intended to interest and engage her students with contemporary texts and relevant questions for guided inquiry, several of the students I interviewed did not consider these features of the curriculum to be engaging. Neither did these curricular elements increase students' positive reader identities or self-efficacy. One of the key reasons that Ms. Bennett's instruction was not entirely successful in these regards – even when students appeared motivated by inquiry-based reading in other contexts – was that students desired more choice in the texts that they read. It seems that while inquiry-guided reading might indeed support students' interest and motivation to read, it may be unsuccessful without provisions for student input in the text selection process. Thus, teachers who choose inquiry as a pedagogical tool to build student engagement should also maintain some level of student choice with respect to primary texts.

Second, this research supports the inclusion of multimodal texts in English language arts curricula. Students in Ms. Bennett's classroom consistently suggested that their reading of multimodal texts increased their self-efficacy as readers – either because the audio-visual components helped them compensate for struggles in their

comprehension of print, or because audio-visual texts confirmed their understanding of printed texts. This was true for students with varying levels (some high, some low) of positive reader identities, self-efficacy, and interest in reading.

Finally, my findings in this study indicated that designing curricula based on multiple ways of reading – or that provides students with multiple models for what it might mean to be a reader – was not enough for encouraging positive reader identities among youth. Rather, in reflecting on their reader identities, students in this study tended to focus more on broad, previously accepted ideologies of reading than on the definitions of reading suggested by classroom Discourses. Thus, to support all students' development of positive reader identities, teachers may need to focus on helping students critique and reconstruct the ideologies that inform their self-perceptions. Future research might focus on how teachers can effectively engaged students in this kind of critical and self-reflective work.

### **Limitations of the Current Study**

While this study yielded helpful insights into students' self-perceptions as readers and discourses of reading in Room 200, the findings have been limited in two key ways. First, the overall sample size for the study was small. Only about one third of the youth in Ms. Bennett's class assented *and* received parental consent to participate in the research. This small sample limited the types of statistical analyses I was able to conduct (i.e., I was unable to make statistical inferences), as well as prevented me from discussing students who experiences and perspectives likely would have contributed to the depth of this

work. Future, similar studies would be strengthened by more robust rates of student participation.

Second, although Ms. Bennett's students were disproportionately male, I was only able to interview one of these youth; this was due not only to low participate rates in general, but also to difficulties scheduling and keeping interview appointments with male participants. Indeed, in several cases, potential male interviewees simply did not arrive for scheduled interviews. It seems possible that interview with additional male students, particularly with a range of reader identities and self-efficacy beliefs, might have generated more nuanced findings related to reader identity and gender. Thus, future studies in this area should aim to speak in depth with a more diverse group of student participants.

### **Directions for Further Research**

While the results of this study provide some insight into relationships between classroom discourse, student reader identity, and reading self-efficacy, several questions remain. For example, future research should explore, in more depth, how and why youth might depend on broader ideologies of reading (rather than on local discourses of reading) when reflecting on their reader identities. Similarly, future research should investigate how and why some discourses and/or ideologies of reading are more salient for students when discussing themselves as readers. In my discussion above, I have suggested that the relative prevalence of difference discourses – in terms of their enactment through classroom activities and text selections – play an important role in how students perceived themselves as readers in the classroom setting. However, it seems likely that



this issue is more complicated. Future studies should include more in-depth interviews with students in order to better understand how youth see, develop, or shift reader identities in varied discursive contexts.

A second line of research should investigate the apparent contradictions in students' perceptions of multimodal texts. That students should have felt more self-efficacious as readers when using multimodal texts – even as their definitions of reading and readers seemed to privilege interactions with print texts alone – was a striking finding of this study. I have suggested that students might have viewed and experienced multimodal texts as useful supplements that increased their self-efficacy by boosting past reading performances and physical comfort while reading. Additional studies might support or complicate this supposition, perhaps through interviews, observational work, and think-aloud protocols with youth as they read print texts with and without multimodal companion texts.

Finally, future research should continue to examine how different forms of inquiry-based reading might contribute to students' engagement and self-perceptions as readers. In my research context, not all students felt supported by inquiry activities, primarily because they had little control over the specific texts that they read. Furthermore, even students who did feel engaged by classroom inquiry focused on the information-gathering aspects (rather than more of the critical literacy aspects) of this work. Follow-up studies should investigate how inquiry-based reading pedagogy might be better structured to support deeper student engagement and critical reflection. Findings of such studies (possibly designed as ethnographies or formative experiments) could be

valuable for critical literacy educators and culturally relevant pedagogues, who can use reading to lead students toward social activism as well as academic achievement.

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## **Appendix A**

### **Assent and Consent Forms**

#### **STUDENT ASSENT FORM**

##### **Exploring Reading Curriculum, Reader Identity, and Motivation in High School English Classrooms**

You are invited to participate in a research study of reading motivation and identity in high school English classes. You were selected as a possible participant because you are enrolled in Ms. Bennett's American Literature class at South Suburban High School. Please read this form and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to participate in the study.

This study is being conducted by Christopher Kolb, a Ph.D. Candidate at the University of Minnesota.

#### **Background Information**

The purpose of this study is to understand how curriculum, teaching, and everyday activities in high school English classes contribute to students' identities, motivations, and practices as readers. Furthermore, this research aims to identify classroom activities that positively affect students' identities and motivations as readers. This study will be conducted in Ms. Bennett's American Literature class at South Suburban High School. The study will begin in Fall 2013 and will be completed by May 2014.

#### **Procedures**

If you agree to participate in this study, the researcher may:

1. Observe you during regular class activities
2. Make notes about your participation in regular class activities
3. Audio-record or occasionally video-record your participation in regular class activities
4. Invite you to participate in audio-recorded interviews about your reading
5. Invite you to complete a survey about your reading

6. Request information from SSHS about your past performance on standardized reading tests
7. Request information from SSHS about your progress toward high school graduation, including number of academic credits earned

You may choose to participate in all, some, or none of the activities listed above.

If you do not agree to audio or video-recording of your participation in class activities, you may be indirectly included in recordings of the entire classroom. However, you will not be included in recordings specifically used for research purposes.

### **Risks and Benefits of Being in the Study**

Participation in this study involves minimal risk, including possible breach of confidentiality. The researcher will do everything possible to protect against this risk.

There are no direct benefits associated with participation in this study. However, the results of the study may contribute to general knowledge about effective and motivating high school reading instruction.

### **Compensation**

If you participate in the study, you will receive a \$10 gift card from Amazon.com, iTunes, or Barnes & Noble in compensation for your time. If you agree to participate in an interview, you will receive an additional \$10 gift card.

### **Confidentiality**

The records of this study will be kept private. In any published report of the research results, the researcher will not include any information that will make it possible to identify you. All research records will be stored securely, and only researchers will have access to the records. Audio and video recordings will be held for five years, after which they will be destroyed. Segments of audio and video recordings might be shared at professional conferences to illuminate research findings for conference participants.

### **Voluntary Nature of the Study**

Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. Your decision about whether to participate will not affect your grades or academic standing at South Suburban High School. Your decision about whether to participate will not affect your current or future

relations with the University of Minnesota or with South Suburban High School. You may choose to not answer any question or to not participate in any part of the study. If you decide to participate, you are free to change your mind at any time.

### **Contacts and Questions**

If you have questions or concerns about this study, please ask the researcher at any time:

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You may also contact the faculty advisor for this research:

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125 Peik Hall, 159 Pillsbury Drive SE  
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Email: [dobrien@umn.edu](mailto:dobrien@umn.edu)  
Office Telephone: 612-625-533

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher(s), **you are encouraged** to contact the Research Subjects' Advocate Line, D528 Mayo, 420 Delaware St. Southeast, Minneapolis, Minnesota 55455; (612) 625-1650.

***You will be given a copy of this information to keep for your records.***

### **Statement of Assent**

I have read the above information. I have asked questions and have received answers. I agree to participate in the study.

Signature of Student: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Is there any part of the study that you would **not** like to participate in, even though you are agreeing to participate overall? If so, please describe the parts of the study that you would **not** like to participate in:

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Signature of Student: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature of Researcher: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

### **Choice of Compensation**

Which gift card would you like in compensation for participating in the study? (Circle one.)

Amazon.com

iTunes

Barnes & Noble



## **PARENT/GUARDIAN CONSENT FORM**

### **Exploring Reading Curriculum, Reader Identity, and Motivation in High School English Classrooms**

Your student is invited to participate in a research study of student reading motivation and identity in high school English classes. Your student was selected as a possible participant because s/he is currently enrolled in Ms. Bennett's American Literature class at South Suburban High School. Please read this form and ask any questions you may have before consenting to your student's participation in the study.

This study is being conducted by Christopher Kolb, a Ph.D. Candidate at the University of Minnesota.

### **Background Information**

The purpose of this study is to understand how curriculum, teaching, and everyday activities in high school English classes contribute to students' identities, motivations, and practices as readers. Furthermore, this research aims to identify classroom activities that positively affect students' identities and motivations as readers. This study will be conducted in Ms. Bennett's American Literature class at South Suburban High School. The study will begin in Fall 2013 and will be completed by May 2014.

### **Procedures**

If you allow your student to participate in this study, the researcher may:

1. Observe your student during regular class activities
2. Make notes about your student's participation in regular class activities
3. Audio-record or occasionally video-record your student's participation in regular class activities
4. Invite your student to participate in occasional audio-recorded interviews about his or her reading
5. Invite your student to complete a survey about his or her reading
6. Request documentation of your student's most recent standardized reading test scores from SSHS

7. Request documentation of your student's progress toward high school graduation, including number of academic credits earned, from SSHS

These activities will be conducted in ways that will not alter or disrupt classroom teaching or learning.

You may choose to allow your student to participate in all, some, or none of the activities listed above.

If you do not consent to audio or video-recording of your student's participation in class activities, s/he may be indirectly included in recordings of the entire classroom. However, s/he will not be included in recordings specifically used for research purposes.

### **Risks and Benefits of Being in the Study**

Participation in this study involves minimal risk, including possible breach of confidentiality. The researcher will do everything possible to protect against this risk.

There are no direct benefits associated with participation in this study. However, the results of the study may contribute to general knowledge about effective and motivating high school reading instruction.

### **Compensation**

Students who participate in the study will receive a \$10 gift card from Amazon.com, iTunes, or Barnes & Noble in compensation for his or her time. Students who agree to participate in an interview will receive an additional \$10 gift card.

### **Confidentiality**

The records of this study will be kept private. In any published report of the research results, the researcher will not include any information that will make it possible to identify your student. All research records will be stored securely, and only researchers will have access to the records. Audio and video recordings will be held for five years, after which they will be destroyed. Segments of audio and video recordings might be shared at professional conferences to illuminate research findings for conference participants.

### **Voluntary Nature of the Study**

Your student's participation in this study is completely voluntary. Your decision about whether to allow your child to participate will not affect his or her grades or academic

standing at South Suburban High School. Your decision about whether to allow your child to participate will not affect your current or future relations with the University of Minnesota or with South Suburban High School. If you decide to allow your student to participate, you are free to withdraw your consent at any time.

### **Contacts and Questions**

If you have questions or concerns about this study, please ask the researcher at any time:

Christopher Kolb, Ph.D. Candidate  
University of Minnesota  
125 Peik Hall, 159 Pillsbury Drive SE  
Minneapolis, MN 55455

Email: [kolb0137@umn.edu](mailto:kolb0137@umn.edu)  
Office Telephone: 612-625-1598  
Cellular Telephone: 734-358-6776

You may also contact the faculty advisor for this research:

David O'Brien, Ph.D.  
University of Minnesota  
125 Peik Hall, 159 Pillsbury Drive SE  
Minneapolis, MN 55455

Email: [dobrien@umn.edu](mailto:dobrien@umn.edu)  
Office Telephone: 612-625-5337

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher(s), **you are encouraged** to contact the Research Subjects' Advocate Line, D528 Mayo, 420 Delaware St. Southeast, Minneapolis, Minnesota 55455; (612) 625-1650.

***You will be given a copy of this information to keep for your records.***

### **Statement of Consent**

I have read the above information. I have asked questions and have received answers. I consent to my student's participation in the study.

Signature of Parent or Guardian: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Student's Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Is there any part of the study that you would **not** like your student to participate in, even though you are giving permission for him or her to participate overall? If so, please describe the parts of the study that you would **not** like your student to participate in:

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Signature of Parent or Guardian: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature of Researcher: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## **TEACHER CONSENT FORM**

### **Exploring Reading Curriculum, Reader Identity, and Motivation in High School English Classrooms**

You are invited to participate in a research study of student reading motivation and identity in high school English classes. You were selected as a possible participant because you are currently teaching an English class at South Suburban High School. Please read this form and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to participate in the study.

This study is being conducted by Christopher Kolb, a Ph.D. Candidate at the University of Minnesota.

### **Background Information**

The purpose of this study is to understand how curriculum, teaching, and everyday activities in high school English classes contribute to students' identities, motivations, and practices as readers. Furthermore, this research aims to identify classroom activities that positively affect students' identities and motivations as readers. The study will begin in Fall 2013 and will be completed by May 2014.

### **Procedures**

If you agree to participate in this study, the researcher may:

1. Observe you and your classroom during regular class activities
2. Make notes about your teaching and participation in regular class activities
3. Audio-record or occasionally video-record your teaching and participation in regular class activities
4. Invite you to participate in occasional audio-recorded interviews about your teaching
5. Ask you to share copies of assignments, class handouts, and other instructional materials

These activities will be conducted in ways that will not alter or disrupt classroom teaching or learning.

You may choose to participate in all, some, or none of the activities listed above.

If you do not consent to audio or video-recording of your teaching and participation in class activities, you may be indirectly included in recordings of the entire classroom. However, you will not be included in recordings specifically used for research purposes.

### **Risks and Benefits of Being in the Study**

Participation in this study involves minimal risk, including possible breach of confidentiality. The researcher will do everything possible to protect against this risk.

Benefits associated with participation in this study include volunteer instructional support provided by the researcher (only as requested). The results of the study may also contribute to general knowledge about effective and motivating high school reading instruction.

### **Compensation**

You will not be compensated for your participation in this study.

### **Confidentiality**

The records of this study will be kept private. In any published report of the research results, the researcher will not include any information that will make it possible to identify you. All research records will be stored securely, and only researchers will have access to the records. Audio and video recordings will be held for five years, after which they will be destroyed. Segments of audio and video recordings might be shared at professional conferences to illuminate research findings for conference participants.

### **Voluntary Nature of the Study**

Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. Your decision about whether to participate will not affect your current or future relations with the University of Minnesota or with South Suburban High School. If you decide to participate, you are free to withdraw your consent at any time. If you decide to participate, you may decline to answer any question or to participate in any aspect of the study.

### **Contacts and Questions**

If you have questions or concerns about this study, please contact the researcher at any time:

Christopher Kolb, Ph.D. Candidate  
University of Minnesota  
125 Peik Hall, 159 Pillsbury Drive SE  
Minneapolis, MN 55455

Email: [kolb0137@umn.edu](mailto:kolb0137@umn.edu)  
Office Telephone: 612-625-1598  
Cellular Telephone: 734-358-6776

You may also contact the faculty advisor for this research:

David O'Brien, Ph.D.  
University of Minnesota  
125 Peik Hall, 159 Pillsbury Drive SE  
Minneapolis, MN 55455

Email: [dobrien@umn.edu](mailto:dobrien@umn.edu)  
Office Telephone: 612-625-5337

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher(s), **you are encouraged** to contact the Research Subjects' Advocate Line, D528 Mayo, 420 Delaware St. Southeast, Minneapolis, Minnesota 55455; (612) 625-1650.

***You will be given a copy of this information to keep for your records.***

#### **Statement of Consent**

I have read the above information. I have asked questions and have received answers. I consent to participate in the study.

Signature of Participant: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Is there any part of the study that you would **not** like to participate in, even though you are consenting to participate overall? If so, please describe the parts of the study that you would **not** like to participate in:

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Signature of Participant: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature of Researcher: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## **Appendix B**

### **Teacher Interview Guide**

Can you tell me a little about your teaching career?

- When did you start teaching?
- Why did you decide to become a teacher?
- Have you always taught English?
- What other courses have you taught?
- How long have you been at South Suburban High School?
- Have you had in preparation in teaching reading specifically?

How would you describe your teaching philosophy?

- What are your overarching goals as a teacher?
- How is your philosophy manifest in your curriculum and teaching in American Literature?
- Do you have any goals specifically related to reading?

How would you describe your American Literature curriculum?

- What are the goals?
- What are the major components?
- How was it developed?
- What is the role of reading in the curriculum?
- Do you aim to develop students' reading skills? If so, how?
- How do you decide what kinds of texts to include? To exclude?
- I'm interested in your use of multimedia texts. Could you share some of your thinking there? Why have you included a range of media?
- What changes would you make to the curriculum next time around?

What are some of your strategies for getting and keeping students engaged in reading?

- Would you say these have been successful in American Literature?
- Do you think students in American Literature are engaged readers? Why?
- Are there students who stand out as engaged or disengaged?

Do you think students in American Literature identify as readers? Why?

- Are there students who stand out as identified or non-identified?
- Do you aim to help students develop positive reader identities? How?



Do you think students in American Literature are skilled readers? Why?

- Are there students who stand out as skilled or non-skilled?

Do you think students in American Literature are confident readers? Why?

- Are there students who stand out as more or less confident?
- Do you aim to help students become more confident readers? How?

Do you think students find the texts in American Literature interesting? Meaningful?

- Are the kinds of reading they do in this class similar to the kinds of reading they would do outside school? Why?
- How have you tried to make the reading relevant?
- Can you tell me about one or two times when this has been successful?
- Can you tell me about one or two times when this has been challenging?

What other challenges have you encountered related to reading in American Literature this trimester?

Can you tell me about one or two times this trimester when you've struggled with reading components of the curriculum?

- Why were these challenging?
- How did you respond to these challenges? Did you feel successful?

What successes have you had related to reading in American Literature this trimester?

- Can you tell me about one or two times this trimester when you've felt especially successful with reading components of the curriculum?
- Why did you feel successful?

Is there anything I haven't asked about or anything else that you think I should know about your teaching? About your students? Or about reading in American Literature?

## **Appendix C**

### **Student Interview Guide**

How would you describe yourself as a student?

Do you like to read?

What kinds of things do you like to read? When do you like to read?

How would you identify as a reader? Do you see yourself as a reader in Ms. Bennett's class?

What makes someone a reader?

Is being a reader an important part of who you are?

How confident do you feel as a reader? Why?

Can you tell me about a time when you felt confident as a reader in Ms. Bennett's class?

Can you tell me about a time when you didn't feel confident?

What kinds of reading are important in school? Why?

What kinds of reading are important in your classroom? Why?

Do you think there are some kinds of texts that are more important than others? Why?

Does using all these kinds of materials affect how you feel/how confident you are as a reader in class?

How interesting are the things you read in Ms. Bennett's class? Why?

How would you describe Ms. Bennett's class? What is it like?

What kinds of reading are important at home and in your community? Why?

How do you feel about yourself as a reader in school? Why?

How do you feel about yourself as a reader at home and in your community? Why?

Is there anything else I should know about you or your reading?

## Appendix D

### Student Survey

Listed below are statements about reading. Please read each statement carefully. Then circle the letters that show how much you agree or disagree with the statement. Use the following key:

SA = Strongly Agree  
A = Agree  
U = Undecided  
D = Disagree  
SD = Strongly Disagree

Example: **I think pizza with pepperoni is the best kind.**

If you are *really positive* that pepperoni pizza is the best, choose SA (Strongly Agree).  
If you *think* that it's good, but maybe not best, choose A (Agree).  
If you *can't decide* whether or not it's best, choose U (Undecided).  
If you *think* pepperoni pizza is not all that good, choose D (Disagree).  
If you are *really positive* that pepperoni pizza is not the best, choose SD (Strongly Disagree).

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1. I enjoy reading in school.	SA	A	U	D	SD
2. I enjoy reading at home.	SA	A	U	D	SD
3. I see myself as a reader in school.	SA	A	U	D	SD
4. I see myself as a reader at home.	SA	A	U	D	SD
5. My teachers see me as a reader.	SA	A	U	D	SD
6. My family sees me as a reader.	SA	A	U	D	SD
7. My friends see me as a reader.	SA	A	U	D	SD
8. Being a reader is an important part of who I am.	SA	A	U	D	SD

<b>9.</b> There is only one right way to read in school.	SA	A	U	D	SD
<b>10.</b> It is important to read different kinds of materials in school.	SA	A	U	D	SD
<b>11.</b> Mostly, the things my teachers assign to read are interesting.	SA	A	U	D	SD
<b>12.</b> Mostly, the things my teachers assign to read are important to me.	SA	A	U	D	SD
<b>13.</b> There are many different ways to read in school.	SA	A	U	D	SD
<b>14.</b> My teachers think it is important to read different kinds of materials in school.	SA	A	U	D	SD
<b>15.</b> My friends think it is important to read different kinds of materials in school.	SA	A	U	D	SD
<b>16.</b> My teachers don't assign readings that students like me are interested in.	SA	A	U	D	SD
<b>17.</b> My teachers don't assign readings that are important to students like me.	SA	A	U	D	SD
<b>18.</b> Reading is a pleasant activity for me.	SA	A	U	D	SD
<b>19.</b> I read better now than I could before.	SA	A	U	D	SD
<b>20.</b> I can handle more challenging reading materials than I could before.	SA	A	U	D	SD
<b>21.</b> Other students think I'm a good reader.	SA	A	U	D	SD
<b>22.</b> I need less help than other students when I read.	SA	A	U	D	SD
<b>23.</b> I feel comfortable when I read.	SA	A	U	D	SD

<b>24.</b> When I read, I don't have to try as hard to understand as I used to do.	SA	A	U	D	SD
<b>25.</b> My classmates like to listen to the way that I read.	SA	A	U	D	SD
<b>26.</b> I am getting better at reading.	SA	A	U	D	SD
<b>27.</b> When I read, I can figure out words better than other students.	SA	A	U	D	SD
<b>28.</b> My teachers think I am a good reader.	SA	A	U	D	SD
<b>29.</b> I read better than other students in my classes.	SA	A	U	D	SD
<b>30.</b> My reading comprehension level is higher than other students.	SA	A	U	D	SD
<b>31.</b> I feel calm when I read.	SA	A	U	D	SD
<b>32.</b> I read faster than other students.	SA	A	U	D	SD
<b>33.</b> My teachers think that I try my best when I read.	SA	A	U	D	SD
<b>34.</b> Reading tends to make me feel calm.	SA	A	U	D	SD
<b>35.</b> I understand what I read better than I could before.	SA	A	U	D	SD
<b>36.</b> I can understand difficult reading materials better than before.	SA	A	U	D	SD
<b>37.</b> When I read, I can handle difficult ideas better than my classmates.	SA	A	U	D	SD
<b>38.</b> When I read, I recognize more words than before.	SA	A	U	D	SD

<b>39.</b> I enjoy how I feel when I read.	SA	A	U	D	SD
<b>40.</b> I feel proud inside when I think about how well I read.	SA	A	U	D	SD
<b>41.</b> I have improved on assignments and tests that involve reading.	SA	A	U	D	SD
<b>42.</b> I think that I'm a good reader.	SA	A	U	D	SD
<b>43.</b> I feel good inside when I read.	SA	A	U	D	SD
<b>44.</b> When I read, my understanding of important vocabulary words is better than other students.	SA	A	U	D	SD
<b>45.</b> People in my family like to listen to me read.	SA	A	U	D	SD
<b>46.</b> My classmates think I read pretty well.	SA	A	U	D	SD
<b>47.</b> Reading makes me feel good.	SA	A	U	D	SD
<b>48.</b> I can figure out hard words better than I could before.	SA	A	U	D	SD
<b>49.</b> I think reading can be relaxing.	SA	A	U	D	SD
<b>50.</b> I can concentrate more when I read than I could before.	SA	A	U	D	SD
<b>51.</b> Reading makes me feel happy inside.	SA	A	U	D	SD
<b>52.</b> When I read, I need less help than I used to.	SA	A	U	D	SD
<b>53.</b> I can tell that my teachers like to listen to me read.	SA	A	U	D	SD
<b>54.</b> I seem to know the meanings of more words than other students when I read.	SA	A	U	D	SD

<b>55.</b> I read faster than I could before.	SA	A	U	D	SD
<b>56.</b> Reading is easier for me than it used to be.	SA	A	U	D	SD
<b>57.</b> My teachers think that I do a good job of interpreting what I read.	SA	A	U	D	SD
<b>58.</b> My understanding of difficult reading materials has improved.	SA	A	U	D	SD
<b>59.</b> I feel good about my ability to read.	SA	A	U	D	SD
<b>60.</b> I am more confident in my reading than other students.	SA	A	U	D	SD
<b>61.</b> Deep down, I like to read.	SA	A	U	D	SD
<b>62.</b> I can analyze what I read better than before.	SA	A	U	D	SD
<b>63.</b> My teachers think that my reading is fine.	SA	A	U	D	SD
<b>64.</b> Vocabulary words are easier for me to understand when I read now.	SA	A	U	D	SD

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**65.** How old are you? \_\_\_\_\_

**66.** What grade are you in? \_\_\_\_\_

**67.** What is your race/ethnicity? \_\_\_\_\_

**68.** What is your gender? \_\_\_\_\_

**69.** Would you be willing to participate in a short interview about your reading? (Circle one.)

Yes

No

Maybe

**70.** If so, when would you be available to participate in an interview? (Circle all that apply.)

Before school

After school

During a study hall

Study hall period and teacher: \_\_\_\_\_

Other

Please specify: \_\_\_\_\_

**Students who participate in an interview will receive an additional \$10 gift card.**